

# BANNER

OCTOBER 2020

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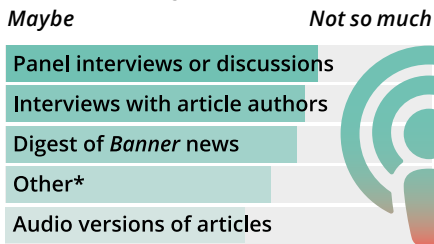
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# BANNER

## BY THE NUMBERS

Worldwide, it is estimated there are now 850,000 active podcasts with over 30 million podcast episodes currently available. We wondered if *Banner* readers were interested in us adding our own to the mix, so we included the question “How interested would you be in the following types of podcasts?” to our reader survey.

### Podcasts Anyone?



\* Ideas included church and culture, volunteerism, theology/theologians, sermons...

The survey was conducted in January and February 2020 by the Calvin University Center for Social Research. A total of 769 participants completed the survey. Of those, about a third were interested in a *Banner* podcast and responded with their preference for the type of podcasts.

## WHAT'S ONLINE

Looking for more? Here are just a few of the stories you'll find online at *TheBanner.org*. (Try typing the headlines into the search box.)

- » Church Worldwide: Billy Graham Statue to Replace That of Charles Aycock in U.S. Capitol
- » Book: *Coo* by Kaela Noel
- » Movie: *The Secret Garden*, starring Colin Firth
- » Audiobook: *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism*

### Behind The Banner

Read these articles at [thebanner.org/column/behind-the-banner](http://thebanner.org/column/behind-the-banner).

- » *The Banner's* Mission: Parts 1-3
- » Why Church News Matters
- » How *The Banner* Reports the News

A blessed Thanksgiving Day to our Canadian readers!

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**Editor** Shiao Chong

**Associate Editor** Sarah Delia Heth

**News Editors** Alissa Vernon, Gayla R. Postma

**Mixed Media Editor** Lorilee Craker

**Art Director** Dean R. Heetderks

**Designer** Pete Euwema

**Contact Us** 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids MI 49508-1407 [info@TheBanner.org](mailto:info@TheBanner.org)

**Address Changes and Subscriptions** 800-777-7270 or visit [TheBanner.org](http://TheBanner.org)

**Classified Advertising** 616-224-0725 [classifieds@TheBanner.org](mailto:classifieds@TheBanner.org)

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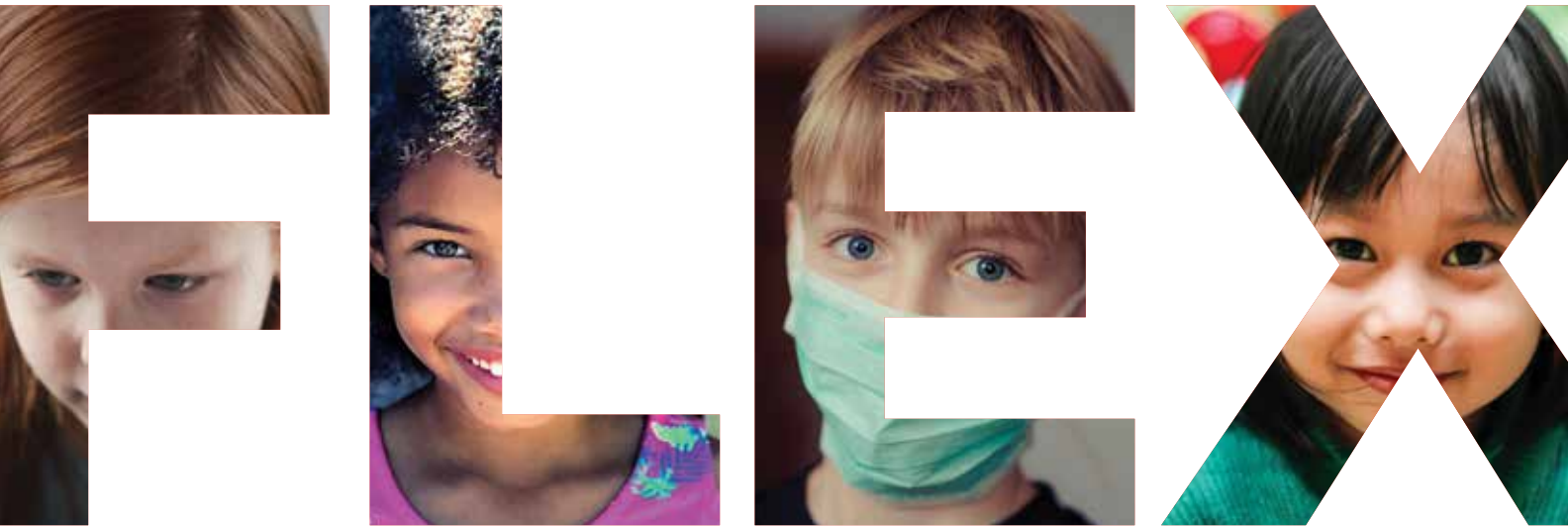
**Editorial** 616-224-0824 [editorial@TheBanner.org](mailto:editorial@TheBanner.org)

**News** [news@TheBanner.org](mailto:news@TheBanner.org)

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# Politically Homeless, Politically Eccentric

Christians who do not feel at home with any of the political factions are less in danger of political idolatry, tribalism, and partisanship.



Shiao Chong is editor-in-chief of *The Banner*. He attends Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Toronto, Ont.

Spanish and Korean translations of this editorial are available at [TheBanner.org](http://TheBanner.org).

이 기사의 한글번역은 [TheBanner.org/korean](http://TheBanner.org/korean) 에서 보실 수 있습니다.

Este artículo está disponible en español en [TheBanner.org/spanish](http://TheBanner.org/spanish).

Thank you to all our readers who have responded to our annual appeal! We are blessed by your generosity. If you missed it, you can still give online at [thebanner.org/donate](http://thebanner.org/donate).

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**ONE OF OUR FEATURE ARTICLES**, “Hope for the Politically Homeless” (p. 32), is the last in a series of six articles produced in collaboration with the Center for Public Justice, an independent, nonpartisan Christian organization focused on policy research and civic education. We explored the theme of an emerging generation of Christians who feel politically homeless in the current divisive politics of the U.S. I recommend all six articles, written by authors including Richard Mouw, Vincent Bacote, and Jessica Joustra, found online at [thebanner.org/tags/political-home](http://thebanner.org/tags/political-home).

As the article noted, “Many Christians describe themselves as feeling politically homeless” because they feel “too conservative for progressives and too progressive for conservatives.” The authors ask, “How can Christians model and practice faithful engagement in public life without putting our ultimate faith in politics, political parties, or leaders?” They suggest that Christians focus on the two great commandments of loving God and loving neighbor to guide them in discerning which public policies might be more just and better for the common good.


Of course, how well we understand what it means to love God and to love our neighbor correlates to how much we immerse ourselves in the biblical story to be transformed inside-out, intellectually and emotionally, by its gospel message and its worldview. A shallow or fragmented acquaintance with Scripture would yield similarly shallow and piecemeal principles that will not guide us well in civic engagement.

In fact, if we only know bits and pieces of the biblical story, those bits and

pieces can easily be co-opted by secular political ideologies. We can even delude ourselves into thinking we have a Christian political vision due to these biblical theological bits and pieces when they are actually attached to a larger worldview alien to the Bible. This is a danger for people of all political stripes.

In one sense it is good for Christians to be politically homeless. Christians who do not feel at home with any political faction are less in danger of political idolatry, tribalism, and partisanship. We should never be at home in any political party because our loyalties are to King Jesus and his kingdom way.

A more positive posture is to be “politically eccentric.” In his blog post “Christianity’s Eccentricity,” Peter Schuurman writes, “*Eccentric* literally means off-centre. . . non-conformist, not following the status quo, and at times, being perceived as odd in the eyes of the world.” We serve an eccentric messiah who gave up his heavenly throne and became a servant (Phil. 2:6-7) to reconcile with his sinful enemies by dying for them (Rom. 5:6-11). Unlike many other religions, Christianity has no central language, culture, or nation. Shouldn’t our political vision, then, be eccentric as well, at odds with the polarized status quo? Our political imaginations should not be enslaved by the world’s political patterns. Christians should be out-of-the-political-box thinkers.

We are politically homeless because our ultimate home is with the Lord. We are politically eccentric because we serve an eccentric messiah whose kingdom does not conform to our world’s systems (Rom. 12:2). 



## REPLY ALL

To send letters to the editor, please see our guidelines at [thebanner.org/letters](http://thebanner.org/letters).

### Radio Ministry

The title “New Mexico Church Spreads Gospel Through Radio” (Apr. 2020) could have been written in the 1950s, when the church in Farmington, N. Mex., was the Christian Reformed Mission. At that time Rev. Herman Schripsema was the missionary, and he realized that the Navajo people were avid radio listeners. With the help and advice of his assistant, Chee Anderson, a weekly program was produced called “Navajo Question Time.” ... Each week one question was selected in advance to be answered in the Navajo language. ... The tapes were delivered weekly to KIUP in Durango, Colo., the only station in the area that would broadcast a half-hour religious program in the Navajo language. ... Rev. Schripsema always credited the radio programs as important to the growth of the Farmington mission, which was organized as a church in 1962. At that time the morning worship service was led entirely by Navajo people in their own language.

» Ellen Joy Schripsema Sharpe // Anchorage, Alaska

### Rewriting Belonging

The article “Rewriting Belonging” from the June *Banner* caught my attention. The author deftly presents a biblical argument for our churches to welcome our diverse neighbors and communities with “the Spirit of wide embrace,” God’s Spirit. For churches that are steeped in the tradition of a high tolerance for the status quo, this is a tall order. Our natural tendency is to offer the “wide embrace” to people in our comfort zone, people who are just like us. As the author observes, “Jesus’ way demanded ... setting aside discrimination and offering a wholehearted welcome to diverse people.” May the Spirit of God search our hearts to seriously consider: are all welcome in this place?

» Ron Sato // Cypress, Calif.

### Speaking Against Racism

Since Shiao Chong’s first *Banner* article up through his current editorials I’ve been keen on his wisdom and clarity of expression. That’s why I was surprised and a bit disappointed at his seemingly trivializing approach in his July/August editorial “Speak Out Against Racism.” ... The truth that “all lives matter” is a biblical maxim. Martin Luther King used the concept to point out that racism wasn’t only a Black justice matter. While I understand not wanting to sidetrack the issue of equality and justice for the Black community with the trite excuse “but all lives matter,” there is a good reason that many who deeply care about Black lives choose not to join the chant “Black lives matter.”

» Jeff Stam // Hudsonville, Mich.

Your editorial regarding your experience with racism in the July/August edition was personal, poignant, powerful. Thank you for it. ... As a lifelong educator, one of the things I’ve learned about lessons is that no matter how often they are taught to the same audience there are always some who fail to learn them. These failures have many reasons: beyond one’s ability/capacity, unwillingness, distractedness, and defiance are among them. An educator realizes that attempting to reteach the lesson too many times ultimately brings diminished results. This brings a question: When will we know when it’s time to stop teaching the lesson and address moving on? Are we there? ... God, why must we wait so long? Historically, the church played a prominent role in the eradication of slavery. Can it bring peace to troubled lands now?

» Jim Krossshell // Grand Rapids, Mich.

Thank you much, Chong, for this editorial. Sadly, it does not surprise me that your passion, patience, and boldness in writing what you knew would engender not merely detractions, but, in fact, cavils and outright denials of your points. I applaud your forthrightness, your clarity in expressing not merely your personal experiences of having been a victim of racism and thoughts about how your own attempts at assimilation amount to a significant denial of your heritage and a diminishment of other persons of different colors and backgrounds. Do please continue to affirm and assert your heritage without apology—as I take for granted a part of my privilege, but am learning to tone down.

» James Dekker // St. Catharines, Ont.



# Another Take on Racism

*Editor's Note: In fulfilling our role as a public forum of diverse viewpoints, The Banner offers this unsolicited article as part of our denomination's collective conversation on a pressing issue.*

## July/August Issue

I would like to congratulate you on the excellent quality of the July/August magazine. Starting from the "Breaking Barriers" ad with the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder note by Enrico Di Giandomenico, the piece on racism by Shiao Chong, the anti-Semitism article by Rev. Doug Bratt, and the crowning gem, "A Death without a Funeral," by Gayla Postma. The magazine had no empty/nothing pages. Just what we need when we are confined home and craving good Christian reading.

» M. Emma Anderson // Prospect Park, N.J.

READ MORE ONLINE



## As I Was Saying

Find the latest posts from our award-winning blog online at [TheBanner.org](http://TheBanner.org).

- » 7 Thoughts in the Wake of #GeorgeFloyd
- » The Opioid Epidemic: A Christian Responsibility
- » The Talmud Has a Lesson for Our Cancel-Culture World
- » In Need of a Pastor

**AT THE JUNE MEETING** of the Council of Delegates, leaders of the Christian Reformed Church presented a Statement Regarding Systemic Racism. A large majority of the delegates approved the statement. I was among eight who were opposed. Let me explain my negative vote.

I was born in New York City, grew up in a multiethnic neighborhood, and attended public schools from first grade to college graduation. We students were from every ethnic background under the sun. We studied and played together harmoniously—Black people, white people, Hispanic people, Jewish people, and Asian people. But that was not the whole story. I was beaten up by a gang when returning from a prayer meeting in Harlem, slammed to the ground and jeeringly called "whitey."

Later, my family and I were missionaries in Japan and learned how Japanese people look back with deep regret on the militarist and racist ideology they had learned, which led them into a war of aggression. After WWII, they faced the enormous challenge of restoring relationships with their neighbors in Asia, whom they had been taught were inferior.


I agree that racism is sin. It is a deep-seated problem, calling for repentance and learning to love all of God's creatures, for we are all made in God's image. But it underestimates the breadth and depth of racism to focus largely on white racism and hammer away at white guilt. There are racists in every ethnic group. This is one reason I could not sign the statement.

There is also systemic racism, built into the structures of society. One lawyer told me how young Black

men receive harsher sentences than young white men for the same crimes. Another friend described redlining: mortgages for homes in the inner city are harder to get. An article in the Wall Street Journal documented how police unions resist disciplining officers who have a history of using excessive force.

Yet two police officers I know resent that people have no idea what it is like to struggle with someone resisting arrest or the split-second decisions that have to be made. They see videos of the officer kneeling on George Floyd's neck and unequivocally condemn choke holds as illegal. At the same time, they wondered if Floyd did anything to provoke the treatment.

We see demonstrations that turn into rioting and looting under the influence of outside agitators. We see capitulation by mayors allowing for enclaves off-limits to the police, where more lives are lost. This serves only to prove how important it is to have police protection.

These are issues that call for serious discussion. But I felt the statement I was asked to sign was too simple to adequately address all sides of the story. 



George R. Young attends Sussex (N.J.) Christian Reformed Church and lives in Stanhope, N.J. Now retired, he is a former pastor of Immanuel CRC in Kalamazoo, Mich., and a former missionary to Japan.



# Financial Literacy: We Can Do Better

By Dirk Pruis

**W**e live in a time when a healthy financial life is increasingly difficult, particularly for young people.

One big reason is that our culture has changed. We're bombarded daily with thousands of messages pushing the benefits of consuming, teaching us to want more of everything. In addition, consuming and overconsuming, regardless of income, have become so very easy. The ease of obtaining credit in all its forms—mortgages, car loans, credit cards, student loans—is convenient but has become a curse for many who lack adequate financial literacy skills.

A survey of over 100,000 college students from over 400 colleges by the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators as well as another by AIG Retirement Services of 30,000 students across a similar

We need to equip our young people to manage their money because Christ calls us to do so.

number of schools produced remarkable findings:

- » Nearly two-thirds of students reported they had never had any personal finance training.
- » NASFAA found that the average correct score for incoming college

students on a six-question test on basic financial literacy was a dismal 33%.

- » The average student debt burden for graduating college students is about \$30,000. Students feel unprepared to handle student loans. While most expect to take on debt to attend college, only 15% of them felt they had the education, information, and resources to be able to pay off those loans in the future.
- » Thirty-six percent of college students surveyed had over \$1,000 in credit card debt.

As Reformed Christians, we believe in the three-legged stool analogy for training our children. As parents, we are partners with our church family and with our local school in training our children. But I think few, if any, of those institutions are currently providing adequate financial preparation.

But is that really a problem? I think so.

We need to equip our young people to manage their money because Christ calls us to do so. What topic is mentioned more than any other in the Bible? Money and possessions. Over 2,000 verses in the Bible talk about money. Suffice it to say that the Bible and specifically our Savior have much to teach us about how we ought to live with money.

So what does the Bible really say about money? I most like Ron Blue's characterization in his book *Master Your Money*: God owns it all. We are merely stewards when it comes to the resources God entrusted to us. Similarly, God will demand an accounting of just what we've done with what's been given to us, as Jesus

taught in the Parable of the Talents. Teaching young people about the basics of how to handle their resources is not about growing their wealth and having more, but about teaching them how to be good stewards of the resources God has entrusted to them.

### What Can We Do?

Training begins at home. Our check-books, bank statements, and tax returns reveal exactly what we believe about stewardship. They tell our life story and reflect our goals, priorities, relationships, and even where we spend our time. Secrecy about our personal finances is the norm in our society. Perhaps the time has come to help our kids understand the kinds of financial decisions we make every day.

In our churches, pastoral support of stewardship is essential. Let's encourage our pastors to preach more sermons and teach us more about the many places God speaks to us about stewardship and how to live our financial lives. This shouldn't be simply an annual "stewardship Sunday" sermon, but regular reminders from the pulpit about what God expects of us.

Schools can be the primary place for teaching specifics of financial literacy. The surveys referenced above noted that the current low level of financial literacy comes from the lack of fiscal education in K-12 education. Only 17 U.S. states require a personal finance course to graduate high school. Of those states, only seven require a financial literacy test to graduate. There are great Christian educational materials for K-12 financial education. It's time we use them in all our schools.

Financial literacy training at the college level is critical because college is often the first time students are personally responsible for managing their finances on a daily basis. Calvin University has several programs to increase student financial literacy.

The cultural pressures on our young people have never been more pervasive or intense. The rapidly changing nature of money and how we access and spend it heighten the need for strong financial literacy. While we are making some headway, training our families to be better stewards of the resources God has entrusted to us needs to be a clear priority. This applies to our homes, our churches, our schools, and institutions of higher education. It's our responsibility as God's faithful stewards. **B**

How can you coach young people and young adults as they become independent through high school, college, and post-college ages? Follow the time-tested advice of notable Christian financial writers Larry Burkett, Ron Blue, and Dave Ramsey, summarized below:

### *Advice for High Schoolers and Young Adults:*

- » Spend less than you earn! Do it always, regardless of your income. There's no more important or fundamental principle of money management.
- » Set short-term and long-term financial goals.
- » Build liquidity by saving toward those goals, including starting an emergency fund—save \$500 in college for that unexpected emergency (a car breakdown or some other rainy-day issue), and save toward at least three months of expenses once you are working.
- » Avoid using debt—only borrow to buy or invest in appreciating assets, such as yourself (student loans in moderation and tied to your future income) and a home.
- » Start to invest toward long-term goals. Start saving early to take advantage of the tremendous power of compounding. Always invest enough toward retirement to take advantage of your employer's match, and use the tax-advantaged vehicles available to you.
- » Give generously and regularly. Make it part of your monthly budget.
- » Track your expenses and live on a budget, and use available tools such as Mint or Quicken to keep it simple.
- » Build a strong credit history. The time to start is in college. Start with a single credit card used modestly and fully paid each month. Use simple tools to check your credit report regularly.
- » Manage your risks wisely through good use of insurance (health, life, disability, property, and casualty and liability), getting good advice along the way.



Dirk Pruis is a professor of business at Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Mich. He is a member of LaGrave Ave. Christian Reformed Church.

## BIG QUESTIONS

### Stewardship

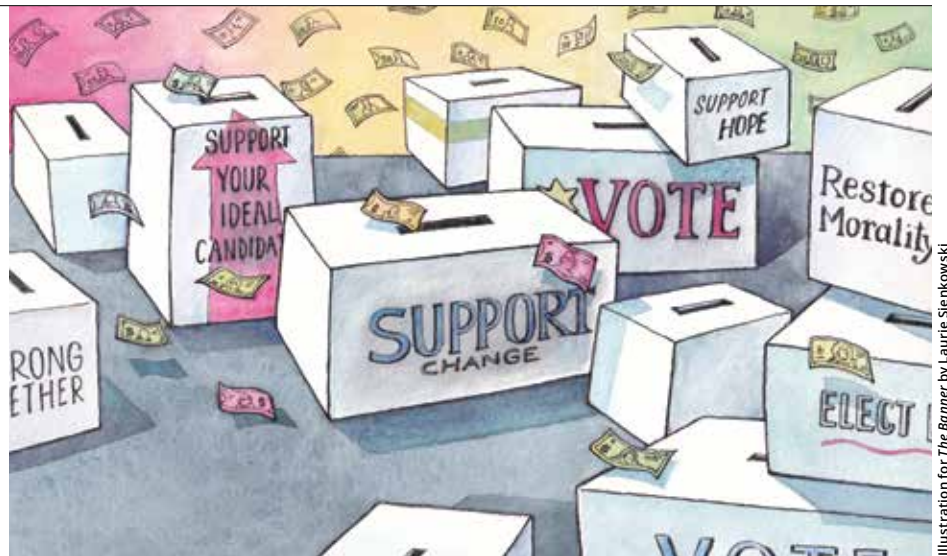
Some of my Christian friends give large sums of money to political candidates and causes.

**Should Christians spend so much money on politics, especially since it seems like trying to buy your way into power or to get your way?**

It's hard to deny that the amount of money spent on political campaigns in North America has gotten out of hand. Each election cycle sets new records for political spending, and we keep hearing of the influence of "dark money" on politics. Political advertising is so prevalent it numbs the mind. Much of it is negative and pushes (or crosses) the bounds of truthfulness.

Christians, just like everybody else, can mistake money-wielding for power. Sending in contributions—large or small—makes us feel as if we shifted the outcome. Little do we consider how we end up participating in the monstrous affront to stewardship that is the election system itself—a wasteful system that sadly still disenfranchises tens of thousands of people and frequently warps candidates and issues so they are barely recognizable. How many Americans are proud of the elections looming in a month's time versus how many are dreading them, praying fervently that they will transpire with minimal problems and will give clear and hopeful results?

Christians should be judicious and thoughtful in their giving to political candidates and causes. Avoid like the



plague those that use underhanded or misleading tactics. Christians should not hide their support or mask their giving so as to mislead about who is sponsoring legislation or underwriting a candidate. Above all, Christians should never equate money with political power and should support candidates and issues by other means when possible—advocacy, action, and encouragement. And it would be wonderful if Christians became strong advocates for fair, fully franchised elections.

Rolf Bouma is an ordained pastor in the Christian Reformed Church who teaches religion, ethics, and ecology in the Program in the Environment at the University of Michigan.

### Church/Bible/Doctrine

**I wonder if I'm called to ministry. How can I know for sure?**

In one sense we are all called to ministry—all Christians are gifted by the Holy Spirit for the common good (1 Cor. 12:7). Some church bulletins say "Ministers: All the Members," indicating that calling we all share. But how do you know if you are called vocationally to be an ordained minister? Well, there are two ways—and they need to go hand in hand.

On the one hand, you will sense the Holy Spirit's nudging inside your heart and soul. That "wondering" you have might be a sign of the Spirit's nudging!

You might find yourself extraordinarily interested in the Bible. You might listen to sermons and imagine how you might preach those passages. Or you might find yourself drawn to church ministries that become a priority in your life.

On the other hand, you might find the church is interested in you! Church leaders ask for your help, or you volunteer and find yourself easily moving into leadership roles. An elder or teacher might say to you, "You should consider ministry; I can see how God could use your gifts." They might see things in you that you hadn't noticed yourself.

These two things that go hand in hand are often called the "inner" and "outer" calls, or the calls "from above" and "from below." The inner call from above is that nudging of the Holy Spirit in your own heart and soul. The outer call from below is confirmation by the church that you are gifted in ways God will use to equip God's people for service and to build up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12). The best way to find out if you are called is to get involved in ministry and see if God's call and the call of the church grow in you and are confirmed.

But the inner and outer callings are not just for ministers. It also applies to elders, deacons, and commissioned pastors—all the officebearers of the church. Each one will experience that hand-in-hand calling and respond

with gratitude, ready to serve the church of Jesus Christ.

Rev. Kathy Smith is senior associate director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, adjunct professor of church polity at Calvin Theological Seminary, and adjunct professor of congregational and ministry studies at Calvin University. She is a member of First Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

### Vocation/Calling

## What if I feel as if I'm wired for a certain field of work or a particular job, but I'm just not like others who do that work?

As we grow up and learn to live into our own skin, we begin not only to grow accustomed to the person God has created us to be, but to flourish. I think this is exactly what Jesus meant when he gave us his life's mission statement in John 10:10: "My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life" (NLT).

The Son of God explicitly told us that he came to earth for the very purpose of making us (and everything around us) become everything we were intended to be. In Jesus, the "not yet" breaks into the "now" as we share in his resurrection and life abundant. In him, we become more alive and more ourselves as Jesus sends the Spirit to act as a living catalyst to unleash the potential of the humanity he created.

Growing up, I distinctly remember feeling a nudge toward some sort of vocational ministry. However, the biggest sticking point was that I didn't see myself fitting into the role of "pastor" as I knew it. The immaturity of my faith still thought within tightly confined boxes and definitions of jobs and callings. I only knew what I had already seen and therefore couldn't imagine myself being truly me and being a pastor at the same time.

Maybe this is why at Pentecost the first thing people received with the

gift of the Holy Spirit were enlivened imaginations:

"In the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on  
all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your young men will see visions,  
your old men will dream dreams"  
(Acts 2:17).

In other words, you don't have to do this life like anyone else. In fact, you'd better not! God's creativity and uniqueness in designing your goals, passions, and story will work only within the uniqueness of who you are. After all, God has 7.5 billion beautiful image-bearers on this planet, but God made only one you. So, may God capture your imagination—and then set it on fire.

Aaron Baart lives in Sioux Center, Iowa, with his family of seven. He serves as the dean of chapel at Dordt University and is the co-founder and president of One Body One Hope, a church planting and community development ministry in Liberia. He and his family attend First Reformed Church in Sioux Center. He co-authored *Vivid: Deepening Your Colors* with Syd Hielema.

### Digital Life

## I get my news mostly from social media, Facebook in particular. As we head into the elections, how do I know whom to trust?


I suggest you ditch social media entirely—and not only for the election season but for all seasons. Solid research suggests social media contributes to feelings of inadequacy (look at *their* backyard or dinner or vacation!), divisiveness, and disinformation (unverified stuff forwarded by you and me but also things that are intentionally false and designed to mislead). And don't get me started on wacko conspiracy theories running rampant (did someone say QAnon?).

If social media can't be trusted, what's a good citizen to do?

Better is to check out a variety of websites published by organizations you trust to see what they have to say about the candidates. Everyone is biased, of course, but at least you know it might be closer to a complete truth. Especially handy are sites that do a side-by-side comparison of candidates, their record on the issues, and their answers to position questions. Established local newspaper sites can also be helpful—search for "voter guide."

Too busy for all that? I'd suggest you get offline and get with someone who is well-informed—someone you trust but don't always agree with (that's key) and have a conversation driven by questions like: What issues do you care about in the coming election? Which candidates seem most in line with how you feel about those issues? If you had to suggest some online places to get a good overview of the issues and the candidates, where would you suggest I go?

Yes, it takes work to be responsible.

Dean Heetderks is co-director of Ministry Support Services of the CRC and art director of *The Banner*. Wondering about any part of the digital side of your life? Tell him about it at [dean.heetderks@gmail.com](mailto:dean.heetderks@gmail.com). 

Got a Big Question for any of our panelists? Email it to [editorial@thebanner.org](mailto:editorial@thebanner.org) with "Big Questions" in the subject line.

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# Missionaries' Home Visits Turn into Video Reports

## NEWS

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Some congregations in the Christian Reformed Church are finding creative ways to maintain contact with World Renew missionaries in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting travel restrictions.

At Midland Park Christian Reformed Church in New Jersey, the congregation's Faith Promise committee connected with World Renew missionary Leanne Geisterfer through video in place of an in-person presentation. Geisterfer was to have visited Midland Park this past spring as part of World Renew's Connection Tours, when its workers share their stories of ministry. Instead, Geisterfer's video about her work in Latin America was presented during Midland Park's Aug. 23 worship service.

Mark Wisse, who co-chairs the Faith Promise committee, said he hopes the church can incorporate a missionary video as part of its "mission moment" in Sunday services at least once a month.

Geisterfer recently retired from World Renew after 38 years of service. The video offered her an opportunity to introduce the Midland Park congregation to Corstiaan Van Aalsburg, who will replace her as a team leader for World Renew in Latin America.

Midland Park has a long history of supporting missionaries for World Renew



Leanne Geisterfer, retired World Renew missionary, in her farewell video from summer 2020.

and other Christian organizations over more than 125 years as a congregation.

"Our church has been very eager to support missionaries, even when times are bad," said Carol Covick, co-chair of the committee.

Typically each committee member is assigned one or two mission workers that they regularly communicate with. Communication has most often been relayed through email, and Covick provides weekly missionary updates in the church bulletin.

The congregation also hosts a mission emphasis event every November for missionaries to provide updates on their work. With the pandemic slowing or preventing travel back to the United States and Canada, having a video of a missionary's work can be an effective tool for sharing with a congregation that provides financial support.

"It opens a window where we can see them and see their work," Covick said.

—Greg Chandler

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## B.C. Pastor Delivers *Banner*, Visits Congregants by Bicycle

While closed church buildings affected the typical distribution, particularly in Canada, of print versions of *The Banner* magazine and *Today* devotional in the COVID-19 restricted months of April and May, Pastor Joel Ringma of Terrace (B.C.) Christian Reformed Church decided to deliver the magazines himself.

"I split Terrace into a grid, plotted the addresses of members, and tried to visit a group of 10-15 in an afternoon," the avid cyclist said. "Terrace is pretty small, so most of the congregation (members) are within 5 kilometers (3 miles) of the church." The rest—one as far away as 90 kilometers (55 miles)—were vehicle deliveries.



Photo by Anita Struyk

Pastor Joel Ringma ready to set out with doorstep deliveries.

More important than the actual delivery or the personal exercise were the physically distanced but socially close pastoral visits Ringma was able to make once he rang the doorbell and stepped back two meters (six feet).

From front-stoop greetings to over-the-fence conversations to handwritten notes, Ringma connected with most of his congregants.

"I was out in my backyard playing with my 1-year-old son when Joel dropped by, and it was such a surprise and joy to see a familiar face over the fence," said Meghan Kort.

In turn, Ringma said, "I was encouraged by the conversations and being able to connect with my people at a time when the social aspects of my vocation were largely muted: no in-church gatherings of worship, meetings, Bible studies; no hospital visits (or) home visits."

He's made one other delivery round since that first spring outing, distributing a new church directory along with other literature.

"I felt like a bit of a library bookmobile," Ringma said. "People would ask, 'Do you have any *Todays*?' or 'Is that this month's copy of *The Banner*?'"

Terrace CRC, which has 175 members, returned to in-person worship mid-June, but only about a third of the congregation can come each week due to restrictions on gathering size. Meanwhile, the church continues to livestream services, and Ringma plans to continue his deliveries, weather permitting.

—Jenny deGroot

## Indiana Church Prepares Care Packages for Cancer Patients



Volunteers decorate care packages to be sent to people with cancer.

Every Tuesday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., conversation and laughter fill Community Christian Reformed Church in DeMotte, Ind., as a group of women gathers to crochet hats, make blankets, create cards, and write notes for people living with cancer.

It's been a weekly occupation since 2015, when Judy Earnshaw, a member of Community CRC, heard about Phil's Friends, "a Christian nonprofit organization ... committed to bringing support and hope to those affected by cancer in the United States." They send care packages and offer spiritual support through prayer to cancer patients of all ages.

The ministry has continued even with COVID-19 restrictions. "We have reopened and are having volunteers in the Hope Center but with limited space," Earnshaw said. "But God has provided for us to be able to continue to distribute care packages and Cards of Hope even through this pandemic. So our mission has not been disrupted!"

Earnshaw is now the charity's development manager for Indiana, and Tracy Szczudlak, another member of Community CRC, runs the weekly volunteer day at the church. The ministry includes two other Christian Reformed congregations—First CRC and Bethel CRC, both in DeMotte—who do monthly Phil's Friends days.

The women who participate at Community CRC have developed deep friendships through their weekly gatherings. Every time a box is packed, they lay hands on it and pray for the person who will receive it. Szczudlak said, "We're trying to reach people to spread hope and love, and tell people that they're not alone."

The care packages include a blanket, a hat, a journal, a puzzle book, a toothbrush, toothpaste, lip balm, a backpack, a water bottle, and a Bible. Earnshaw said, "God is using this to reach cancer patients and those that are around them through showing his love to them and to the volunteers who help."

—Kristen Parker

## Stitchers at a Michigan Church Sew 5,000 Masks



Photo by Becky Stob

Becky Kissinger and her two daughters, Esther and Lydia, model some of the Neland Stitchers' masks.

Members of the Neland Stitchers group at Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., have so far sewn more than 5,000 face masks for use during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. They began their mission to help meet the need for protective masks after a local physician shared her concern that there would not be an adequate supply. Using a pattern recommended by the Spectrum Health Foundation, the group began to sew in March and has committed to continue until there is no longer a need.

"Our corner of the city is in one of the highest concentrations of COVID(-19) cases," project organizer Mary Kuiper said. "If we care about those around us, we need to see to their safety."

Stitcher Karen Weaver added, "We are in a small corner of a very large crisis. What can we do? How can our hands be the hands of Christ? We sew."

The group has distributed masks to anyone who needs them, including local medical facilities, community centers, missions, and homeless shelters. They've shared them with bus drivers and with police officers, asking them to carry extras in their squad cars. Masks were added to activity bags for summer community programs and sent to Rehoboth Hospital in Gallup, N. Mex., and Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage.

—Anita Ensing Beem

## Seafarers Ministry Sees Developments, Adaptations

On a Friday afternoon in July, Michelle DePooter-Francis made a Walmart stop to pick up items requested by seafarers restricted to their ships due to protection measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. DePooter-Francis is lead chaplain of the Ministry to Seafarers, a mission in the Port of Montreal, and a commissioned pastor of the Christian Reformed Church. On this day, the ships in Montreal's harbor came from Indonesia, Montenegro, Ukraine, Russia, Croatia, India, China, and the Philippines, and the shopping list included chocolate, socks, electronics, and toothpaste—all things to bring comfort when an unexpected pandemic has kept you on board four or five months past the end of your contract.

"Most crew members haven't been able to get off the ships since March," she said. "In many cases, it's just now that some of them are able to go home." The uncertainty takes a mental toll on seafarers. With no clear date to return home and feeling anxious for their families, many are struggling with depression.

Normally the Ministry to Seafarers offers those working on ships a home away from home in the harbor and personal visits aboard ships. Now many visits happen at the top of the gangway. Even though it's limited, "that personal contact and being able to have at least a bit of a conversation, to show people that we're here and available, and if they need to talk they still have our contact—that's extremely important," said DePooter-Francis. She shares this work with assistant chaplain David Rozeboom, administrator Patricia Sarazen, volunteers, and interns.

The center reopened July 6 with extra measures in place to be as safe as possible for seafarers, but while Transport Canada now permits limited time on shore for crew members, many companies or captains will not allow it. DePooter-Francis said crew from only a few ships had visited.

DePooter-Francis also recently joined "Chat to a Chaplain," an initiative of the International Christian Maritime Association and the Anglican international ministry Mission to Seafarers. She is one of about 25 chaplains from around the world available to chat online with struggling seafarers and with worried friends and families of ship crews. Embedded in various websites and promoted through social media, the chat box was launched in April.

—Maia VanderMeer



Ministry to Seafarers intern Eleni is ready for a ship visit.



## Harvest Party Welcomes Neighbors, Shares Gospel



Vogel Center CRC's Harvest Party in October 2019.

In McBain, Mich., Vogel Center Christian Reformed Church plans to host its third annual harvest party this month. For the past two years the church has welcomed neighbors to enjoy harvest-themed events suited to the community's rural roots.

"We are a farming community, so instead of focusing on a Halloween event, we focus on thanking the Lord for the harvest each year," said Danielle Hoekstra, chair of the church's outreach team.

Hoekstra said the 2018 event, which spanned a couple of hours on Halloween night, welcomed 300-400 visitors to enjoy "hay rides, trunk-or-treat, inflatables, food, (and) a petting zoo." In 2019 the event moved to a Saturday afternoon, and Hoekstra said their numbers went up. "(We) lost count after going through 650 hot dogs!"

That year they also invited The Conquerers Strength Team, a group that travels to events "to demonstrate feats of strength and share a gospel message," Hoekstra said.

Hoekstra intends to use different platforms to share the gospel each year. "This has become an event that encourages our members to engage in conversation with people in our community they never would have talked to in other settings—a starting point for personal evangelism," Hoekstra said.

To make guests feel more comfortable attending during the COVID-19 pandemic, the outreach team planned a completely outdoor event, again on a Saturday afternoon, with attractions spaced out to help with social distancing.

—Kimberly Simpson

## Noteworthy

The Christian Reformed Church in North America belongs to several ecumenical partnerships, including the **World Communion of Reformed Churches** and The Canadian Council of Churches. This summer the WCRC, along with three other global Christian organizations, **issued a letter to the finance ministers and central bank governors of the Group of 20 nations** expressing appreciation for the leaders' efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic and calling for more "to be done to mitigate human suffering and promote a truly just and sustainable recovery." The advocacy is in line with the priorities the WCRC set at the last meeting of the General Council in 2017. The G-20 summit is in November.

In July, **The Canadian Council of Churches** and its two partners in a three-year legal challenge **welcomed the Federal Court of Canada's ruling that sending refugee claimants back to the United States under the Safe Third Country Agreement violates the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.**

"Given that the Court has clearly set out the ways in which detention in the U.S. violates people's fundamental rights, the organizations call on the government of Canada to immediately stop sending people back to the U.S. under the Safe Third Country Agreement, and not to appeal the decision," the Council said in a news release.

**Calvin University's Global Faculty Development Institute**, established in 2018, **received an \$11 million gift** from the estates of Rimmer and Ruth de Vries. The Institute has been **renamed The de Vries Institute for Global Faculty Development.** Matthew Lundberg, a Calvin professor of religion, is the institute's director.

Denominational ministries of the **Christian Reformed Church in North America received help from U.S. and Canadian government grant and loan programs** amid COVID-19 economic struggles.

Terry Veldboom, director of finance and operations (Canada), said benefits from Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy and Temporary Wage Subsidy totaling **CDN \$1,065,910 went to support payroll for employees of Back To God Ministries International, the CRCNA, Resonate Global Mission, and World Renew.** In the U.S., **the denomination made use of the Paycheck Protection Program.** John Bolt, director of finance and operations (U.S.), said, "The program is designed for organizations with less than 500 employees and is intended to help cover payroll costs to help avoid layoffs and cutbacks of staff. We received approximately **\$4.2 million as a low-cost loan.**"

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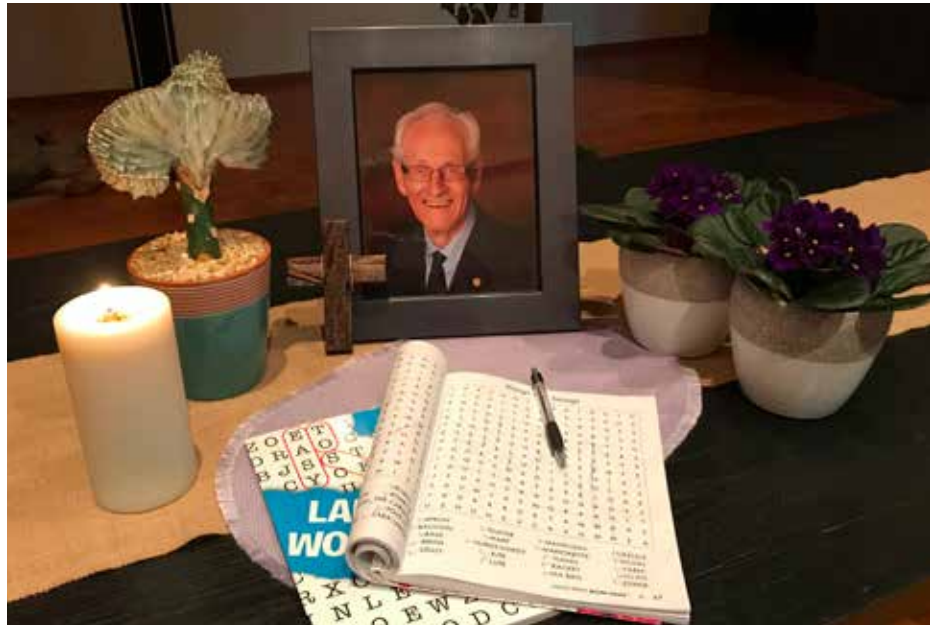
## Families, Pastors Show Flexibility, Sensitivity in Hosting Funerals During COVID-19

“As a family, we always expected that Dad would die slowly of health complications, that we would sit with him in his final hours, singing some of his favorite hymns from the *Psalter Hymnal*,” said Karen Brouwer Vlieg.

But her father, John Vlieg, died suddenly and unexpectedly in early April in a care home without a family member present. His wife, Mae, who lives with supportive care in an adjacent building in the Elim Retirement Village in Surrey, B.C., had not been able to visit her husband of 59 years. Brouwer Vlieg, her mother, and siblings are just one of many families who have had to plan a funeral service for a loved one during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I also grieve not having the memorial service I had imagined,” Brouwer Vlieg said. But what the Vliegs did experience was immediate support from their pastor, Tom Bomhof, and others from their church, Fleetwood Christian Reformed Church in Surrey. Although the care home was under strict lockdown, Bomhof was able to connect with Mae, Karen, and Karen’s out-of-town siblings via phone calls and online meetings, providing pastoral comfort but also tending to the immediacy of planning a meaningful way to honor John’s life.

The family was able to prepare reflections, choose Scripture readings and songs, and provide a memory table for use in a livestreamed service. The pastor and musicians were in the sanctuary.



Because Mae was not able to leave her care home, her children decided they would join the service from their respective homes as well. The service included participation of the children and grandchildren (one of whom lives in the U.S., unable to attend) by video.

### Advice

In a March 8 post on [network.crcna.org](https://www.network.crcna.org), Cecil Van Niejenhuis, recently retired co-director of Pastor Church Resources, provided early advice for pastors and councils about funeral protocols. He encouraged church leadership to have conversations prior to a situation arising. It allows for “a decision being made on the basis of thoughtfulness and prudence rather than being driven by the heat and urgency of a death in the church community.”

Bomhof was just one of many pastors benefiting from this early advice. “The Vlieg service was early on in COVID(-19) practice, and we were just beginning to

A table is set in Fleetwood CRC in memory of John Vlieg. The service was livestreamed with no one but the pastor and musicians in the sanctuary.

adjust. ... For the family, it was hard not being together at a time when they really wanted and needed to be. Grieving families need hugs and touches, and COVID-19 took that away from them, adding to their grief,” Bomhof said.

### Support

Eldean Kamp’s husband, Len, passed away in May within a week of a cancer diagnosis. The Kamps are members of Trinity CRC in Abbotsford, B.C. Their family’s situation was similar to that of the Vliegs: an unexpected passing in a time of pandemic restrictions. The Kamps, too, were supported by and worked together with their pastor, Andrew Vanderleek. They also decided on a service in the church with only three family members present. Despite travel restrictions affecting Kamp’s son and daughter, who with their families live in the U.S., Kamp is grateful for the ways technology provides unexpected opportunity and blessing.

## Churches Welcome Babies, Adapt Baptism During COVID-19

The recorded service has had almost 700 views, a reminder to Kamp of the widespread community that supports her.

### Waiting

Retired pastor Martin Contant was invited to preside over a service for an elderly person from Immanuel CRC in Langley, B.C., a congregation currently without a pastor. The family decided to have a graveside memorial with plans for a service at a later date when family living in the U.S. might be able to cross the border. Contant provided support and guidance via phone calls and video calls. Attendance at the interment was limited and physically distanced, but the ceremony was livestreamed by the funeral home.

### Good News

Reflecting on this COVID-19 time, Bonhof said, "This affirms for me the value of rituals of grieving. Even if it has to be severely modified, a funeral or memorial service is an important part of the grieving process."

"Even in these unusual times, I still get to be the bearer of the good news," Vanderleek said. "God is the one who gives comfort and hope."

"Pastoring is, in essence, a ministry of presence," Contant said. "We are able to hold open a space for family members to reflect on God's presence and their experience of God's presence as seen in the life of their loved one."

—Jenny deGroot

As COVID-19 continues to affect people all over the world, churches have adapted the way they gather, celebrate communion, practice outreach, and more. Churches blessed with families welcoming a new baby at this time have had to consider how to enfold the new child into the community and how to extend ministry to the growing family.

First Christian Reformed Church in Barrie, Ont., helped a young family whose first baby arrived early and in the middle of a move. "We got a call from the grandmother, a longtime member, who asked if we had any baby items that could help this young family out, since all the stores were closed," children's ministry coordinator Rachel Kapteyn said. "After a brief visit to our church nursery, the grandmother borrowed a few items. We were happy to have the items being used instead of sitting idle."

First CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich., has a meal ministry for families with new babies. "During the pandemic we've tried to continue tangible support to (those) families," said Adam Rodeheaver-Van Gelder, pastor of congregational life and youth ministries. "The clearest way we've done this is by providing meals. When a family has had a child, beyond the usual communication checking in to see how the baby, mother, and family are doing, their elder reaches out to see if the family would like some meals provided by the household (group)."

In late June, First Vancouver (B.C.) CRC performed a baptism outside with the pastor wearing a face shield. Pastor Trevor Vanderveen said, "Sacraments draw us into God's work and his promise to be with us in whatever we face. Just as we adapted communion to be practiced virtually, we felt it important to make baptisms available as a reminder to the parents and our worshiping community that we are held by our loving and faithful God."



Photo by Sophie Vandenberg

Chelsey and Caleb Vandenberg with their three daughters as the youngest is baptized at Bethel CRC in Acton, Ont., July 5.

"I explained to those present that while baptism is deeply personal, it is not private," Vanderveen added, "and they represent the rest of our worshiping community in promising to help raise this little one in the faith."

At Bethel CRC in Acton, Ont., Pastor Ray Vander Kooij baptized two babies July 5. The two families stood at either end of a table, each with their own bowl of baptismal water. As Chelsey Vandenberg held her daughter, the pastor instituted the baptismal words and Chelsey's husband, Caleb, applied the water. "There was something extra-meaningful about Caleb being the one to sprinkle the water on her head," Chelsey said.

—Kristen Parker

## IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Neal Roger Rylaarsdam*  
1944-2020

Neal Rylaarsdam was approachable, and he loved blessing others and making people laugh. His PowerPoint sermons were practical and memorable. He was renowned for his special cinnamon buns and enjoyed playing piano for hymn sings. Rylaarsdam died June 4 following complications from heart surgery.

When Rylaarsdam was born on D-Day, June 6, 1944, in Sumas, Wash., the hospital staff, distracted by the radio news, temporarily switched him with a Canadian baby.

In his youth, Rylaarsdam participated in Youth Unlimited's first Alaska SWIM (Summer Workshop in Ministry) team, returning home with a Siberian husky. He later graduated from Calvin College and Seminary, where he sang in the choir. After ordination in 1972, he pastored the following Christian Reformed congregations: Fairlawn, Whitinsville, Mass.; Winfield (Ill.); Quincy (Wash.); Bauer, Hudsonville, Mich.; and Lexington Green Community, Portage, Mich. For the last 14 years of his ministry he served 12 different congregations as a specialized transitional pastor.

In retirement, the Rylaarsdams swam, traveled, and played cards. Additionally, Rylaarsdam enjoyed painting, Instant Pot cooking, and organizing fundraising cook-offs. An avid genealogist, he helped many explore their ancestry.

Rylaarsdam is survived by Glenda, his wife of 55 years; three children; their spouses; and nine grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

## Alberta Musician Shows Love to Neighbors from Her Porch

Ann Vriend is an award-winning singer and songwriter living in Edmonton, Alta., whose scheduled performances at home and abroad were canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"In April, when it was clear my upcoming European tour would be indefinitely postponed, I started to realize how much I missed performing for people," Vriend said. "So I took my keyboard out to my front porch on a windy, bleak Sunday and messaged a few neighbors that I was going to try a small performance from there."

Recognizing the kind of "soul food" and comfort music can be, she just kept performing, Sunday after Sunday.

By mid-August, 30-50 people were listening each week, sitting on lawn chairs or standing nearby. People pushing shopping carts filled with their belongings stopped to listen.

Vriend lives in McCauley, one of Edmonton's oldest inner-city neighborhoods. "There is a fairly constant stream of foot traffic on my street," said Vriend. "Part of the neighborhood is also host to numerous agencies that have various handouts and services for the homeless population. That tends to keep people who need those things never too far away."

One day a man named Tony started singing with Vriend from the sidewalk. He had such an amazing voice that Vriend asked him to open for her the following week. That day happened to be Tony's birthday. Vriend asked her mother, who usually brings a huge bouquet of flowers to the Sunday concerts, if she could give it to Tony. Louisa Bruinsma, Vriend's mother, took it one step further and made a big chocolate layer cake. Everyone sang "Happy Birthday" while the cake was brought "on stage." Tony cried. He said he'd had only two birthday parties in his whole life. Another man, sitting in a wheelchair, clapped and waved his hands, saying over and over, "I love you, Ann!"



Neighbors listen from lawn chairs as Ann Vriend sings from her porch stage in Edmonton, Alta.

Janis Irwin, member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, which includes McCauley, attended one of the porch concerts. "Throughout the pandemic, I've seen the power of community truly highlighted. Neighbors have come together in creative, but physically distanced ways," she said. "Ann's porch concerts are just one example: neighbors are brought together, sometimes for the first time, and passersby who stop to listen end up staying a while."

Vriend is a member of Edmonton's Fellowship Christian Reformed Church, as are her parents. Bruinsma confessed, "We often wished that Ann had a 'real job' with benefits, but now we see something else: her witness, respect, acceptance, and love for her neighbors. I believe she is extending the hand of Christ, who probably would feel very much at home in a neighborhood where we often feel very uncomfortable."

—Janet A. Greidanus

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# A Hunger for Miracles

By Katy Johnson, World Renew

**J**esus called himself the Bread of Life. As his body, the church is called to offer life with our presence. Never is this exhortation more critical than in moments of meeting the physical hunger of God's children.

How this bread is being shared by the church during COVID-19 reveals a powerful theme: the oldest members of Christ's body are leading the way with creativity, courage, and love.

### **Multiplying Bread in Silver Spring**

Before March, the food pantry of Silver Spring CRC in Silver Spring, Md., served around 100 families once a month. In late July, 655 families visited in a single week.

They weren't alone. Ten months after the first cases of COVID-19 were reported, the United Nations' World Food Program has identified almost a billion people around the world who now face food insecurity. Beyond the immediate health crisis of the pandemic, the economic and agricultural fallout of physical distancing has left families exposed, with those who were barely managing now made even more vulnerable.

In Silver Spring, food pantry director Jennifer Renkema said the pantry's ability to meet rising needs has been nothing short of a "story planned by God," built in part upon a passionate group of older community and church members who believe that loving our neighbors starts with serving.

Silver Spring CRC has a special relationship with the older adults of their community, many of whom are Orthodox Jews and live together in what is called a "village."

The village movement, started in Boston, Mass., offers a cost-efficient model for supporting aging people in their neighborhoods, connecting them to their local community and empowering them to continue living in their homes.

Through the village model, these older adults build rich relationships with community members who support them by driving them to their doctors and grocers, hosting social gatherings and events in their homes, and performing home and yard maintenance.

Silver Spring CRC recognized the beauty of this model and committed to play a part in its local village community.

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Abuela Maira tends to her aquaponics garden, drawing out fresh tilapia to provide for her family.

Today, senior pastor Doug Bratt serves as a member of the Silver Spring Village board.

When COVID-19 erupted in Maryland and the Silver Spring CRC food pantry decided to shift to weekly food pick-ups, they were overwhelmed by the community's needs. One evening in May, immediately after a food distribution, Bratt was chatting with Village members and was visibly discouraged: how would the food pantry continue to meet the vast demand?

That's when the Village members showed the church what it looks like to carry one another's burdens. These adults, who deeply understand the beauty of life in community, pledged their financial resources and time to care for families facing economic instability due to COVID-19.

Since then, the food pantry has found the food and financial support needed to serve well over 500 families every week from April through August. Funding has come from a variety of sources, including five local Catholic and Presbyterian churches and a World Renew grant.

Between April and July, World Renew granted over \$100,000 in small, one-time gifts to churches throughout North America, partnering specifically with Diaconal Ministries Canada to help Canadian congregations bridge the gap in their own communities for the many families experiencing financial hardship due to the virus. The top services needing support were food pantries, food drop-offs, and community gardens.

The small grant to Silver Spring helped them stock their food pantry, but the church's elderly neighbors also played a crucial role.

Food banks had been struggling because grocery stores were running low on supplies and had nothing to donate. When Silver Spring CRC found itself with enough money to purchase needed food pantry supplies but no food to buy, a woman from the Village called to ask what the pantry needed.

"Who thought I would be in a position where I had money and no food?" Renkema said. "I shared with this woman the situation, and she said, 'You call Larry, the local kosher grocer, and he will take care of you.' Sure enough, I called Larry, and he has been ordering food to stock the food pantry ever since, selling it to us at cost. That generosity from Larry profits him nothing, and it is everything to us."

Almost every week holds more miraculous stories than Renkema can count.

She shared about Ms. Ruth, who lives in the senior living apartments near the church and has a fixed income. A long-time customer of the food pantry, Ms. Ruth has volunteered at the pantry for years and attends Silver Spring CRC.

With COVID, Ms. Ruth decided it was no longer wise for her to directly serve the families who visit the food pantry, but she has helped to prepare food for pick-up, giving her a chance to stay connected with friends and help the community while practicing social distancing.

“Since COVID-19, it has been hard to connect with people,” Ms. Ruth said. “They are scared, and I am scared too. I have asthma, and I am a diabetic. It’s a dangerous time, and so physical distancing is important. At the food pantry, Jennifer has really thought the safety measures through, and I appreciate that. I feel safe picking up my food and also bagging the vegetables each Tuesday with college students ... and people’s children all working together and spread out.”

Renkema said Ms. Ruth is one of dozens of older neighbors and churchgoers in Silver Spring from a number of congregations who are finding a way to give back to the community while still practicing physical distancing. For Renkema, these dear, faithful souls are each a miracle sent by God to multiply bread and nourish hope. For Ms. Ruth, the Silver Spring food pantry is often the highlight of her week: “I love it; I love it; I love it. To put a smile on people’s faces gives me so much joy.”

### Offering Living Water in Honduras

God’s everyday miracles stretch far beyond the borders of Maryland. In Azacualpa, a village in Honduras, Abuela (grandmother) Maira keeps hope alive in her community through a partnership with World Renew.

In Honduras, the markets pose a particular threat for virus transmission, and the government has mandated that each family is allowed to shop at the market only once every two weeks, assigning families different days to limit crowd exposure. Each time Maira or her daughter travel to the market, they must gather all the food they require to feed themselves and Maira’s grandchildren.

Maira’s family has found hope and safety through World Renew’s aquaponics initiative, which allows them to use fresh water in their own back yard to grow vegetables and raise fish and shrimp from the safety of their home.

With less than an hour of effort a day, Maira can raise fresh, nutritious food for her family without risking exposure in the market. And thanks to personal protective equipment from World Renew, she can safely travel to the homes of 100 other families to provide training so they can sustain aquaponics systems as well.

Between April and July, World Renew delivered 114,698 pounds of emergency food to families around the world who had been in lockdown. It also brought health support to more than 250,000 people throughout Latin America.


In Maira’s case, the gift of personal protective equipment combined with Maira’s courage and wisdom has meant that thousands of people in the Azacualpa community have been trained in aquaponics and now have a stable food source to provide for their families.

### Sharing our Tables Around the World

For many of us, particularly those who are older or immunocompromised, how we connect with our communities has changed radically during the pandemic. We hug less, share food less, enter one another’s homes less. Our contact with one another is more careful, and it often includes a few feet of distance.

Yet as Abuela Maira and the people of Silver Spring remind us, COVID-19 cannot hold us back from loving each other. We belong to each other, and our phone calls to grocers, bagging of vital cooking supplies, and visits to help our neighbors tend their aquaponic gardens all serve as the connective tissue of our faith right now. This is how we keep being Christ’s body and sharing his table.

This month World Renew joins thousands of churches and families in its annual World Hunger Campaign. With nearly a billion people currently experiencing food insecurity because of COVID-19, the need this year is particularly high. Even so, we see the ways in which the church continues to hunger for miracles, and we praise God for the chance to join in that story with people who offer love and courage like Ms. Ruth and Abuela Maira.

Even in these difficult times, the faith of the older generation continues to light our way. 

*If you are inspired by this article and seek a way to share your table this season, explore the stories of other grandmothers, families, and communities changing the story of hunger at [worldrenew.net/worldhunger](http://worldrenew.net/worldhunger).*



# Caring for Seniors During COVID-19

## WHEN COVID-19 FORCED LAGRAVE

Ave. Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., to shut its doors to in-person worship back in March, church leaders made sure that all members would be able to participate in online services.

“We realized that some of our older members were not as comfortable with technology as others, so we helped ensure that those with computers and tablets knew how to access our livestream service,” said Rev. Ruth Boven, LaGrave’s minister of pastoral care.

A recent United Nations report on aging says that an aging population is “poised to become one of the most significant social transformations of the 21st century, with implications for nearly all sectors of society. By 2050, one in four persons living in Europe and Northern America could be aged 65 or over.”

As a denomination, is the CRC being intentional in its engagement with and support for people in their third third of life (over age 55)? How do we help them stay connected and fully included in the life of the church? How has the global pandemic affected our connections with our seniors? Are we responding with creativity and passion to these questions?

Disability Concerns spoke to a number of denominational leaders to learn what the CRC and other faith communities have been doing, specifically during the pandemic, to make sure that all members, especially older people, are staying connected.



Zach DeBoer, a member of ClearView CRC in Oakville, Ont., does a window visit with his grandmother, Alice DeBoer, on her 92nd birthday.

Here are a few of the stories we heard:

- » A Methodist church made sure that a woman in her late 80s had the technology she needed to join a weekly online Bible study.
- » Young adults from a Baptist church connected with older members who felt isolated by shopping and running other errands for them and checking in with them by phone.
- » Another church collected or purchased and configured tablet

computers so seniors who were shut in could easily access online worship services.

- » Pease (Minn.) CRC worked with the local Elim Home assisted living facility to make sure residents could join Sunday morning worship services and Friday morning Zoom “coffee time” with the rest of the congregation. The Elim Home staff either helped the residents set up their own laptops or showed the gatherings on the TV in a common area.
- » Younger members of Baldwin (Wisc.) CRC wrote cards of encouragement that were sent to local shut-ins.
- » A pastor in Iowa delivered hard copies of his sermon to the doorsteps of elderly parishioners that didn’t have access to technology.

“All these examples help us remember that we are the church. We are the body of Christ,” said Mark Stephenson, director of Disability Concerns. “It is our job to work with other members of the body so that all belong. While we are living through a time in history that is riddled with examples of grief and sadness, we are called to deliver hope.”

Disability Concerns and Faith Formation Ministry have collaborated to create *The Third Third of Life Toolkit*, which offers resources and tips for congregations wanting to find creative ways to support and encourage older members. Find it online at [crna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits/third-third-life-toolkit](http://crna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits/third-third-life-toolkit).

—Becky Jones,  
Disability Concerns

## The View from Here

## A Reflection on Aging

### MANY OF US HAVE MIXED FEELINGS

about aging. As we approach what has been called the “third third of life,” we sometimes reflect wistfully on those parts of life that we are losing. As young people, for example, most of us take our physical abilities for granted. We seem to think of ourselves as invulnerable. Yet as we grow older we realize that we have slowly become more susceptible to ailments and disease.

While aging often includes a relinquishing of our former physical abilities, I believe it also includes the development of new and lasting memories, capabilities, and wisdom.

God’s Word is replete with stories of how people, young and old, have been used for God’s glory. These Bible stories fly in the face of current conventional wisdom that the old are “past their prime” and are less useful than younger people.

Consider the story of Abraham. At the age of 75, God asked him to leave his home and embark on a journey of creating a new generation of God’s people. In modern history, we see many examples of artists, writers, and political leaders who are in

## Retirement can be a shift into mentorship and support of the new generations

their “latter years” making important contributions to our world that they didn’t or couldn’t make when they were younger.

God uses all of us, regardless of age.

In the Christian Reformed Church, our average age is increasing. While we still have young families and new children born, as a whole denomination we are aging. Viewed through our normal cultural lenses, this can be a significant problem. However, recognizing the God we serve and how God has used many in the past and present, there is another way to view our condition.

God has blessed us with capable, wise, discerning, and experienced saints who can still significantly impact the world if they allow themselves to be available to God.

In this issue of *The Banner*, we reflect on examples within the church of how to better care for our aging population. We also reflect on how our aging population is being used to bless the church and the world. Many congregations are now implementing opportunities for intergenerational ministry—young and old co-laboring together, just as God intended, for the benefit of both.

As I get closer to my own retirement, I often reflect on the fact that the only time “retirement” is referenced in the Bible is in the story of the priests attending God’s tabernacle. At the age of 50, these men were asked to stop serving directly and instead to become mentors to the younger generation (Num. 8:25). This is a beautiful picture of what retirement can be: not retirement from all labor, but retirement from a position or activity while we transition to a new role. Retirement can be a shift into mentorship and support of the new generations who assume the mantle of leadership.

May we live into this reality with all of the seasoned and wise people and resources with which God has graced us.



Colin P. Watson Sr. is the executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Spanish and Korean translations of this article are available at [TheBanner.org](http://TheBanner.org).

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Este artículo está disponible en español en [TheBanner.org/spanish](http://TheBanner.org/spanish).

# COVID-19 and Calvin Theological Seminary

**EACH MAY THE CALVIN** Theological Seminary community gathers to celebrate those graduating from various certificate and degree programs. May 2020 was different. The COVID-19 pandemic precluded such a gathering.

Instead, the school did what it could to recognize and celebrate these important achievements by creating a video montage of pictures of graduates and their families ([vimeo.com/420427114](https://vimeo.com/420427114)).

It also hosted a drive-through event. Each graduate received a gift and took a picture with CTS president Jul Medenblik (from an appropriate social distance).

“COVID-19 may have changed how we celebrate, but it could not change our celebrating our 61 graduates, who came from Brazil, Canada, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Kenya, South Korea, and the United States,” Medenblik said.

The pandemic also affected how students finished the semester. Like many schools, Calvin Seminary pivoted to online education in March. Because of its investment in distance education about nine years ago, Calvin



Ali Salim, a Master of Theology graduate, poses for a socially distanced picture with President Medenblik during the May 2020 drive-through commencement ceremony.

Seminary was able to change gears over a single weekend.

“We are grateful for this investment that is still paying dividends,” Medenblik said.

This shift to online education enabled the school to do even more than it had originally intended. Over the summer, Calvin Seminary joined with Calvin University to offer online courses for church leaders looking to explore and engage relevant topics such as evangelism, discipleship, and education in the challenging context of COVID-19. More than 300 church leaders enrolled, leading CTS to provide even

more short-term online courses and sessions.

“This past spring and summer has led to our continuing to be flexible in response to the context we are in,” Medenblik concluded. “Whether it is by face-to-face or online instruction, Calvin Theological Seminary is still serving as it has since 1876.”

—Margaret Mwenda,  
Calvin Theological Seminary

## Secret Mail Carriers

**“YOU CAN’T ACCEPT THEIR HELP.”** “You can’t sing that song.” “That is illegal.”

In North America, Christians don’t hear those phrases when we want to share what Jesus has done in our lives with others.

Yet in many parts of India, it is illegal to try to convert someone to Christianity, making sharing the gospel extremely difficult.

“India is a difficult place to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ for several reasons,” Back to God Ministries International’s Hindi ministry leader said. “The government has moved to make it harder to evangelize. The caste system keeps people entwined in the Hindu religion. And access to radio and discipleship materials is limited.”

Over the past few years, new laws in many of India’s states have made it increasingly difficult to disperse magazines and Bible study materials through the government-run mail system.

Instead, when someone contacts the ministry asking for devotionals or Bible study materials, volunteers such as Mrs. Hiramani get these materials into their hands. Hiramani and other BTGMI Hindi ministry volunteers will deliver the materials to nearby readers on their way to work or the market.



As she grew in her faith, Hiramani knew she couldn’t keep this good news to herself.

### Hiramani’s Growing Faith

Hiramani’s faith began through her sister’s connection to BTGMI’s Hindi ministry. Hiramani’s sister, a talented singer, recorded a song for a BTGMI radio program and played it for Hiramani. That small act eventually led Hiramani to go to a seekers meeting.

These events are becoming more difficult to organize, and they completely stopped when COVID-19 infections peaked in India. Yet as of August 2020, BTGMI’s partners in India have been able to continue meeting in person and even plan to plant more churches in the next year where they see a growing number of believers.

As Hiramani grew in her faith, she knew she couldn’t keep the good news to herself. She began promoting the Bible study course that she was a part of as well as other BTGMI

Hindi ministry programs to her family, friends, neighbors, church members, and colleagues. She even got some of them to help support the production of these materials financially.

In the past few months alone, more than 40 people have completed the Bible study. Few would have been able to participate without volunteers such as Hiramani bringing the materials to them.

Kurt Selles, BTGMI’s director, joins the Hindi ministry team in valuing your partnership too. “In this season of Thanksgiving,” he said, “we are thankful for Hiramani and for Christian Reformed members and congregations who make these gospel-centered materials possible”

—Brian Clark,  
Back to God Ministries International

## ‘I Didn’t Believe in Jesus’

### Rejecting the Good News

Lydia\* grew up in a country where the government keeps a close eye on religious activities, and an expression of faith can be life-threatening. Many Christians end up renouncing their faith or keeping it secretly. Lydia didn’t have the opportunity to hear the gospel.

Later in life, however, Lydia moved to the United States to be with her family and care for her grandchildren. For the first time, she had the opportunity to hear the gospel—but she initially rejected it.

“I didn’t believe in Jesus,” said Lydia.

For nearly 10 years, Lydia didn’t think any more about Jesus. But then she and her husband rented a room from a young Christian couple and started getting to know them. Whenever the couple’s parents stopped by, they made an effort to talk with Lydia and her husband.

### Witnessing God’s Grace

Around that time, Lydia was diagnosed with breast cancer, and she found she could relate with her landlord’s mother, Dr. Amy\*, who was diagnosed with terminal cancer earlier in life while she was a medical doctor.

Through conversations, Lydia learned that Dr. Amy, who also came from Lydia’s country, had grown up in a Christian family. Dr. Amy had buried her Bible in the ground and stopped praying when she felt any expression of faith would be risky.

When Dr. Amy was diagnosed with cancer, she realized she had been living her life in a way that did not honor God. When she confessed her



After becoming a Christian later in life, Lydia found a supportive faith community through a CRC church plant led by Rev. James and Winnis Chiang (pictured here).

sin and asked for forgiveness, she said, God healed her.

Lydia was amazed by Dr. Amy’s testimony. God opened Lydia’s eyes to God’s mercy and goodness. “I saw the grace of God as I was going through chemotherapy,” said Lydia.

She came to accept Jesus as her Savior.

### Support from a Church Plant

Lydia decided to join a Bible study group led by Rev. James Chiang of Union with Christ Church, a Christian Reformed church plant that Resonate Global Mission supports with grants and training opportunities. Lydia wanted to learn how to read and study God’s word, and Union with Christ Church provided the perfect opportunity.

When Lydia’s husband was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease and later

admitted to a memory facility, she became depressed and worried, but she found strength and support from her small group.

“When we study the Bible together as a group, I feel like I’m literally receiving the strength and power from God to face my difficulties,” Lydia said. She praised God when her husband miraculously came to accept Jesus in the memory facility.

Rev. James’ wife, Winnis, who helps lead the Bible study, has witnessed how the study has affected not only Lydia but the rest of the members too.

“All of the members support and pray for one another,” Winnis said. “It’s not just a Bible study group; it’s a life support group.”

*\*Names have been changed for security.*

—*Kayleigh Fongers,*  
Resonate Global Mission



## CROWDFUNDING SINCE 1862



**Have you noticed the trend? From Uber and Airbnb, to community-supported agriculture and Kickstarter, people value sharing and working together.**

As members of the Christian Reformed Church, it's something we've been doing for a long time. Since its earliest days, CRC congregations have pooled their funds to do shared ministry—such as global evangelism, curriculum development, and training of pastors—that would be impossible for any individual or congregation to do on our own.

This system is called *ministry shares* and it is a remarkably stewardly and cost-effective way to accomplish important ministry together. It works when we all participate.

Learn more at

**[crcna.org/MinistryShares](https://crcna.org/MinistryShares)**

# Apples to Apples

**FALL IS A FUN TIME** to pick and enjoy apples. They taste great and are good for our bodies. Did you know that there are more than 7,500 kinds of apples grown around the world? They can be as small as a cherry or as large as a grapefruit! Let's take a look at some of the reasons that apples are the perfect fall fruit to snack on!

## An Apple a Day

Have you ever heard the saying "An apple a day keeps the doctor away"? Apples have a lot of vitamin C, which is good for your body. Vitamin C helps keep your immune system strong and healthy so that your body can fight germs and infections.

Apples are also a good source of fiber. A medium-sized apple can have up to four grams of fiber—about 17% of the daily amount of fiber your body needs.

## Why Do Apples Turn Brown When They Are Cut?


Have you ever watched your parents cut an apple and noticed that it turns brown? This is a chemical reaction that happens because of an enzyme (something that helps chemical reactions) in apples. When oxygen from the air touches these enzymes, it causes the apples to turn brown. You can help stop this chemical reaction by eating your apples right away after they are cut or by keeping them in an airtight container.

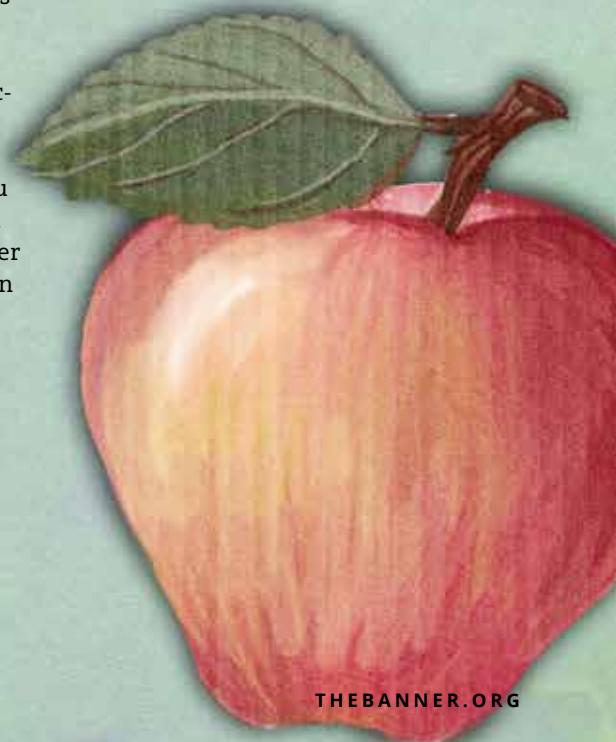
## Try This Science Experiment!

Ask an adult to cut the following fruits and vegetables for you and place each food on a plate or napkin: one apple slice, one raw potato slice, one radish slice, and one piece of banana. Set a timer and see how long it takes for each fruit or vegetable to turn brown. Do they turn brown at the same time? Write down the results of your experiment.

## The Apple of God's Eye

*Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings* (Ps. 17:8).

Have you ever heard one of your parents or grandparents say, "You are the apple of my eye"? It doesn't mean that there was a real apple in their eye! It is a saying that means someone is very special. Because we are loved by God, we are the apple of his eye! The next time you bite into a juicy apple, remember that you are loved and cherished by God! 



Christin Baker is a full-time stay-at-home mom who also writes for Faith Alive. She is a member of Resurrection Fellowship Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.



# Hope for the Politically Homeless

By Chelsea Langston Bombino and Katie Thompson

*The world today feels as divisive as ever, with a variety of topics pitting neighbor against neighbor and even Christian against Christian as many cling to their tribes while others find themselves without a political home. Where does that leave us as Christians? How do we move forward together? The Banner teamed up with the Center for Public Justice to release a series of articles exploring these topics. This is the last of six. To read the first five, visit [thebanner.org/tags/political-home](http://thebanner.org/tags/political-home).*

**F**or Christians in North America, navigating politics in 2020 might feel like navigating a minefield. Whether in our homes, congregations, or workplaces, engaging in politics can be fraught with risk, division, and contempt. To make matters worse, many Christians don't feel their views are adequately represented by any one political party or platform. Too conservative for progressives and too progressive for conservatives, many Christians describe themselves as feeling politically homeless.

What happens when one feels politically homeless? As Kerwin Webb explored in this series' opening article online, "A Politically Homeless Generation," political homelessness can often lead to checking out of political engagement altogether. It can also lead to a sense of deep frustration and questions of identity. Those seeking to find a home or a primary identity in politics will ultimately be frustrated when no

leader, platform, or party adequately represents all of their viewpoints.

How can Christians model and practice faithful engagement in public life without putting our ultimate faith in politics, political parties, or leaders? We believe there are biblical principles that point us toward a hopeful vision of Christian civic engagement.

As Christians, we are called to seek the well-being and flourishing of our neighbors and communities. This is often accomplished through our churches and through community-based organizations. Yet without a political dimension—attention to the role of government and public policies that affect the daily lives of our neighbors—the work of loving our neighbor is incomplete. Addressing racial and socioeconomic inequalities exposed by COVID-19, for example, requires that public policies are made and administered with justice.

How can Christians who feel politically homeless engage faithfully and hopefully in their political communities in this moment?

## **Creation, Fall, Redemption**

Many Christian Reformed members are familiar with the biblical framework of creation, fall, and redemption. For us, political homelessness results from Christians getting stuck on either the original goodness of creation or the seemingly impenetrable brokenness of sin. Political homelessness happens when Christians fail to fully

recognize Christ's redemptive work and participatory invitation in every area of human life, including politics.

The antidote to political homelessness is to focus on Christ's redemptive calling for us to reform every area of life toward his image. In his book *Healing for a Broken World*, Stephen Monsma writes, "Since Christ's work of redemption is ongoing, and since Christians are agents of that redemption, the profound and powerful conclusion is that we are called to be God's agents of reconciliation in all aspects of life (including politics)." Let us unpack the framework of creation, fall, and redemption.

## **Creation**

God created the world—not just individuals, but the physical environment too—and called it good. God created humans in God's own image and gave them the capacity to fulfill multiple roles at once in differentiated areas of life, such as family, workplace, church, school, politics. In doing so, God created not just individuals but the communities in which we live. God had good purposes for these institutions. This is perhaps most clear in the primacy of institutions like families and worshiping communities. We see God's inherent goodness in these places and God's perfect vision for these communities to be places in which we bear God's image. But God's good purposes also extend to government and to our role as citizens shaping our political community. In short, there is no part of our lives and



communities, including government, that is apart from God's goodness.

### **Fall**

But then the fall happened. It affected every area of life, including all individuals and all institutions. We know the effects of sin, of being separated from God, affect not only our personal walks of faith. Brokenness as a result of sin affects God's original good purposes for every community, including communities of believers. Despite God's perfect purposes for family, for example, divorce, child abuse, trauma, economic hardship, substance abuse, and other symptoms of sin and brokenness pervade this institution. The fall also affected government and political systems.

Corruption, injustice, greed, racism, and many other challenges stain not just our individual hearts, but our institutions, including the institutions that make up political communities.

### **Redemption**

Thankfully, that is not the end of the story. God sent God's son, Jesus, to die for our sins. This is the heart of the Christian gospel, and for many Christians the most immediate and resonant effects of the redemptive nature of the gospel (rightly so) are in our personal relationships with God and each other. However, Jesus' redemptive work is also present and aspirational in every community of responsibility in which we are called to take part. This includes shaping healthy governments and political communities.

Christ's redemptive work in the world recognizes the goodness of the structures God created to administer justice, but also the need for healing and redemption in these same structures because of systemic sin. Sin is present because of the fall, but that is not the end of the story. Christ's redemptive invocation calls us to recognize God's good purposes for government and urges believers to seek a hopeful, renewed vision of justice.

When individuals experience political homelessness, they might believe the

God's good purposes also extend to government and to our role as citizens shaping our political community.

existing political systems are working well enough for them and their interests. But Christ calls us not just to dwell in God's creation as "good enough," but to continue to seek the betterment of every human institution in which we fulfill our responsibilities.

Christians experiencing political homelessness also might get stuck in the hopelessness many of us feel when we see systemic sin, especially when apparent in institutions like government and political parties. It's hard to resist dwelling on the fallenness of public officials, public policies, and government. But when Christians linger in paralysis rooted in the belief that politics is irretrievably broken, they fail to see the restoration the gospel calls for in every area of human activity, including politics. Christians are called to move through the narrative of creation and the fall toward redemption. Christians must resist accepting the status quo as "good enough" and the belief that our political systems are so distorted by sin that they are not worth trying to redeem.

That's easier said than done. But here are some biblical principles with applied examples of how to move out of political homelessness into a realistic, yet hopeful engagement toward redeemed political systems.

### **Principles to Guide Christians in Public Life**

In *Healing for a Broken World*, Monsma calls Christians to focus first on identifying normative biblical principles relevant to government and public policy. Only after such principles have been developed should we turn to specific policy prescriptions and implications. We believe this is an approach that politically homeless Christians should follow.

When asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt. 22:37-39).

How might we derive guiding principles from these two commandments to love God and to love our neighbors? Here are some possibilities:

The command to love God presupposes that humans have religious freedom. No one can come to know and accept Christ as their Savior through governmental coercion. The principle of religious freedom is essential for the fulfillment of Jesus' command to love God with everything we have.

Redemptive public policies should, as a baseline, work from the principle that all humans and the groups they form have the freedom to embody their most sacred beliefs. For Christians, this requires us not only to uphold public policies that protect our own freedom to live out our love of God. This principle also calls Christians to advocate for public policies that protect the freedom of other individuals and groups with different beliefs and practices. This extends not only to explicit religious acts, like worship and prayer, but also to how individuals and groups engage in service and citizenship.

What does this look like in practice? Christians should first recognize they cannot advocate for the religious freedom of other people if they don't have some basic literacy regarding

the spiritual beliefs and practices of others. Christians cannot advocate for religious freedom for their Muslim, Buddhist, or atheist neighbors when they don't understand the basics of what these individuals need to freely exercise their faith.

For example, last spring, in response to COVID-19, the U.S. Congress passed the CARES Act. Among other provisions, the CARES Act made available to small businesses and nonprofits—including congregations and faith-based organizations—potentially forgivable loans to cover basic payroll and operations expenses during the height of the pandemic. In our work at the Center for Public Justice, through dialogue with Muslim faith-based organizational leaders, we learned that there was some concern that Muslim organizations would not be able to apply for such loans because if the loans were not forgiven there would be a small interest rate attached to them. Muslims are forbidden to take or pay interest. Since the CARES Act program is essentially an interest-bearing loan, it becomes difficult for Muslims to participate. As a result of this conversation, we were able to connect Muslim leaders to appropriate public officials tasked with ensuring regulations did not violate religious freedom for them. Upholding just public policies requires that Christians advance religious freedom, even and especially for those with whom we disagree.

The call to love our neighbor also requires that we honor and uplift the human dignity of every person. We do this because every person is created in the image of God. When looking at any public policy proposal, we ought to ask if it seeks to honor and uphold the dignity of those affected by it.

Jesus calls us to treat others as we would like to be treated (Matt. 7:12). In terms of how this principle applies to shaping public policy, Christians should consider not only how policies affect their own interests, but also how these policies affect the interests of neighbors, especially the most marginalized.

What does this look like in practice? One example is a group of young Christians in New Jersey. Michael, a recent Princeton Theological Seminary graduate, led a small group of his fellow students through an 11-week curriculum that equips participants to advocate for a local issue of the group's choosing and culminates with the group meeting with a public official. Michael's group decided they would focus on the issue of cash bail reform in their community.

None of the group's participants were directly affected by the public policies governing cash bail, and yet they asked themselves how they could advocate for policies that would more closely reflect how they would like to be treated in this situation.

"Individuals and families with fewer financial resources available to them are often unable to post bail in order to get themselves or a family member out of jail after an arrest." Michael said. "This is a problem because an inability to post bail results in separation from familial support networks and job loss, which creates deficits in social and financial capital, further perpetuating poverty and socioeconomic inequality."

Michael's group was surprised at how easy it was to schedule a meeting with a public official—in this case, the office of New Jersey's attorney general—to advocate for the well-being of their neighbors.

These are only a few examples of how Christians are applying the biblical principles of love of God and love of neighbor to their public policy engagement. But engaging to shape just public policies that reflect Jesus' redemptive call is not an all-or-nothing endeavor. Christians, together and in their current spheres of knowledge and influence, can make small steps toward enacting change.

It is often said among social workers that people do not experience physical homelessness because they run out of money, but because they run out of human relationships and

social networks that offer meaningful support during difficult periods. This model can be applied to those experiencing political homelessness as well.

People do not experience political homelessness only because they do not see political candidates, policies, and party platforms that perfectly align with their own beliefs. Christians might experience political homelessness because they have few redemptive spiritual supports to continually redirect them to Jesus' command to participate in his redemptive work in the world, loving God and loving our neighbors in every area of our lives. But through a redemptive lens, Christians can seek biblical principles rooted in Jesus' two greatest commandments—love of God and love of neighbor—to form just public policies. Christians can also form communities of support that work together to advance justice in incremental and attainable ways, one conversation across differences and one meeting with a public official at a time. 



Chelsea Langston Bombino is director of Sacred Sector, an initiative of the Center for Public Justice. She also serves as an adjunct professor at Pepperdine University and serves on the board of several nonprofit organizations, including First Amendment Voice and Young Leaders Institute.



Katie Thompson is the program director and editor of Shared Justice, the Center for Public Justice's initiative for people in their 20s and 30s who are passionate about exploring the intersection of faith, justice, and politics. She is co-author of *Unleashing Opportunity: Why Escaping Poverty Requires a Shared Vision of Justice* with Michael Gerson and Stephanie Summers.

1. Do you feel yourself "politically homeless"? Why or why not?
2. The authors argue that Christians need to advance religious freedom...

[READ MORE](#) [ONLINE](#)

# The Safe Place

One night, around three in the morning, there was a loud knock on our door. My parents awoke. They knew what that knock meant.



Agnes Fisher is a writer and teacher who was born in the Netherlands and grew up in New Jersey. She attends Second Christian Reformed Church in Grand Haven, Mich.

**I REMEMBER TINI.** She was a teenage girl who lived with us during the war. When I was old enough to understand, my mother told me who she was and why she was with us. I had always wondered why this friend from my toddler years had suddenly left us.

Tini's father walked all the way from Amsterdam with his teenage daughter. She needed a safe place. He knew he could not continue to feed her if they stayed in the city. Like so many others, he took to the road in order to escape the ravages of the Nazis.

He knew my father through an acquaintance and hoped our family would take her in. He figured we probably had some food because we lived in a small town with gardens to help supply us.

They were fatigued and hungry by the time they got to our house. Hope kept him upright. When my mother opened the door he saw a kind face. "This is my daughter, Tini," he said. "We can't feed her anymore. I wonder if she could live with you for a while. She is a good girl and will help with the children."

"Come in. Sit down. Let me get you a bit to eat. We don't have much either, but you can have some bread and soup." My mother cut the bread, which was more like hardtack. The watery beef soup would help, she explained; it could soften the bread if one dipped it.

They were so grateful. He ate the bread like a man starved, as did Tini.

Tini lived with us for the duration of the war. She had found her safe place.

But all was not well in our town. The occupation covered the entire country, and Hitler had vowed to make the Dutch "eat grass." It never came to that for us, but it was close. The Nazi

occupation reduced entire countries to hellish conditions.

One night, around three in the morning, there was a loud knock on our door. My parents awoke. They knew what that knock meant. It was better for my mother to answer even though she was visibly eight months pregnant. The Nazis sent their soldiers through all the towns to gather able-bodied men and cart them off to Germany for the workhouses. Few ever returned. Mother went to the door. There stood two very young German soldiers. They took one look at her and asked her husband's age. She told them. He was the right age and in apparently good health; they knew they had orders to take him.

But they paused. My mother tried not to tremble, but she had two little boys upstairs and another on the way; what could she do? The soldiers looked at one another, nodded, and noted my father's age as a few years older than he really was. Then they left. We were safe.

When the war finally ended, there was great relief. But my mother was not at peace. She agitated to emigrate to America. My aunt was already there and would sponsor us. Three years later, the family sold everything they had, bundled up their children, and left for America. Mother had found her safe place. For now.

I know now that there is no totally safe place on this earth. But I am reminded time and again of Paul's words in Philippians 1:21: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." And so I know we have a safe place after all. In Christ, we have a truly safe place, no matter what. **B**

# The Heart of Encouragement

Barnabas was instrumental in the overall growth of the fledgling church.



Tony Maan is pastor of the Christian Reformed Church of St. Albert, Alta. He is very thankful for the many who have encouraged him through 33 years of ministry.

**WHO WOULD WE IDENTIFY** as the individuals responsible for the legacy of the New Testament era? Probably the apostle Paul, surely Peter, and the gospel writers. But how about Barnabas? We vaguely recall him as a figure whose name means “son of encouragement.” But how did he act as an encourager? And what lasting impact did his attitude make? Let’s consider this underrated individual and explore the role of encouragement in the early church, see the substantial perspectives on Jesus it has granted us, and remember its spiritually enriching power.

## **Barnabas: The Link of Encouragement**

Barnabas was instrumental in the overall growth of the fledgling church. When introduced in Acts 4, what is he doing there? He is selling land and offering its proceeds to support the struggling community. Barnabas also was a missionary preacher. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith and gladness, exhorting the church (Acts 11:23-24). Barnabas’ generosity in money, time, teaching, and preaching encouraged the church, and it grew.

Would we have the gospel of Mark were it not for Barnabas? Acts 15 explains that Barnabas stood up for a vulnerable Mark when Paul refused to take Mark on a mission trip because he had previously abandoned them. Had Barnabas not encouraged the lad and taken him on his own missionary

journey, Mark might have disappeared into obscurity. Instead, God used Mark to write what most scholars agree is the first written canonical account of Jesus of Nazareth. This gospel portrays Jesus as the suffering Messiah King. In contrast to the other three gospels, the theme and event of crucifixion dominates. Could we say Barnabas was the critical link that enabled Mark to write his portrait of Jesus?

Next, consider the ministry of the apostle Paul. Barnabas was instrumental in ensuring the newly minted apostle took up the mantle of the church’s first missionary. After Paul’s dramatic conversion, Barnabas alone had the courage to believe Paul and persuade a skeptical church in Jerusalem that he could be trusted (Acts 9:26-31). Consequently the apostle planted churches throughout Asia Minor all the way to Rome. Paul’s epistles (nearly half of the New Testament writings) reveal a wealth of knowledge about life in Jesus: justification by faith alone (Romans); being new creations in Christ (Corinthians); law and gospel (Galatians); the church as the body of Christ (Ephesians); joy in Jesus (Philippians); the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ (Colossians); and the hope of Jesus’ return and our resurrection to new life (Thessalonians). God used Barnabas as an encouraging link in affording us this treasure from the first century to today.

If Paul and Mark had not been encouraged by Barnabas, would we possess this rich revelation? I imagine God in God’s sovereign will would have arranged it. But God chose to use the person of Barnabas as a key figure in bringing it about, perhaps to show us the fruitfulness of organically giving encouragement. What a

powerful difference the practice of encouragement can make in bringing the kingdom!

### **The Perfect Priestly Encourager**

Barnabas' ancestral family was the Levites, the priestly tribe (Acts 4:36). By nature and calling, priests are helpfully encouraging; their primary role is to serve the Lord and others. Barnabas embodied his Levitical name. His testimony points us to a greater priest.

In fact, Jesus is the perfect priest. In the eternal order of Melchizedek (Gen. 14:17-20; Heb. 7:1-18), Jesus offered himself without blemish to God, securing our redemption and cleansing our consciences (Heb. 9:11-14). As our intercessor, he is forever before the Father (Heb. 9:24). The Belgic Confession says that as our high priest, Jesus loves us more than anyone (Art. 26). What encouragement for all of us who are imperfect each day!

One outstanding example of the redemptive effect of encouragement was Jesus' restoration of his disgraced disciple Peter, who denied Jesus at his lowest. Did Peter wonder if Jesus would still ask him to be his disciple? The answer comes in an exchange between Peter and the resurrected Jesus one morning. Jesus began, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Three times Peter confessed his love. Then came words of forgiveness in a call to mission: "Feed my sheep." Restored by the perfect encourager, Peter became a leader, began to bring the gospel to the world, wrote two biblical letters, and became the eyewitness of Jesus for the first gospel writer, Mark John. What fruit of priestly encouragement!

### **Encouraged to Be an Encourager**


Failures in our relationship with Jesus might not be as public as Peter's, yet they harm no less. Still, when we disappoint Jesus, he always invites us to come to him in repentance, assuring that he will never give up on us. He loves us more than anyone. His sacrificial love restores us eternally to him and calls us to follow.

An extracanonical writing purported to be from Barnabas, the General Epistle of Barnabas, was written to encourage readers. He explains that when the Lord "chose his disciples, afterwards to publish his gospel, he took men who had been very great sinners; that they might plainly show, that he came not to call the righteous but sinners" (4:12). Choosing broken sinners, Jesus remits our sins and puts us "into another frame, forming us again by the spirit" (5:11). We find ourselves in a new "frame" or spiritual space in which we are enabled to love each other (14:18). Even through our missteps, Jesus loves us and calls us to feed his flock. Barnabas' letter reminds us to be encouragers as we have been encouraged.

The word "encourage" means to give courage, and the word courage comes from the Latin word *cor*, which means "heart." To encourage means to give someone heart. This can come in innumerable ways: visiting the lonely, praying for another, sharing the gospel, or saying "I love you," for example. Our acts might ostensibly go unnoticed but are actually used by God as a means of deepening faith. Giving courage makes present the experience the first-century church enjoyed:

generosity, building community, and the saving presence of Jesus, our suffering King.

Through encouragement we spread the gifts of Paul: we share the news of being justified by grace, of being new creations in Christ, of the law and gospel, of life in the body of Christ, of the joy of the Spirit, of the supremacy and all-sufficiency of Christ, and of the hope of his return. Encouragement acts as a conduit, drawing on the past riches of God's redemptive work and causing them to play in the present.

Barnabas' proper name was not Barnabas, but Joseph (Acts 4:36). But he has been known by his nickname throughout the ages. His encouraging nature warranted it. Imagine that: to be known by our Christian character rather than our proper name! As unsung heroes, let us encourage one another with the heart of Barnabas. In doing so, we are the presence of Jesus, our perfect High Priest. 

1. Recall a time when someone encouraged you. What was said or done that encouraged you? What did you learn from that experience?
2. How much encouragement happens in your church community? Do we need to be more encouraging?
3. Do you see much encouragement happening in our culture and society? Why do you think that is?

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

# How Do We Love One Another in Times of Deep Division?

**WE ARE LIVING** in a time of increasingly toxic conflict, exacerbated by not one but two social upheavals: the pandemic and racial tension boiling over.

*Uncommon Ground: Living Faithfully in a World of Difference*, by Tim Keller and John Inazu, shows believers how to reach faithfully across deep and painful differences. Besides Keller and Inazu, 10 leaders—including LeCrae, Tom Lin, and Christian Reformed Church member Shirley Hoogstra—share their stories to help answer the question “How do we love one another even when we radically disagree?”

Former Madison Square CRC member Rudy Carrasco, who contributed the chapter “The Entrepreneur,” shares his vision of living in a way that is “faithfully present” even in conflict.

## What is your definition of entrepreneur?

Entrepreneurship is simply creating something new where there was nothing. Right now, with two social earthquakes going on, is the perfect moment for this kind of response. Think of any city with problems. You can step into those problems with entrepreneurial solutions and be part of shalom in this moment. God has this. God will empower you. I worked for many years with [civil rights activist and community developer] John Perkins, whom people think of as a theologian and racial reconciler. But he has this enormous entrepreneurial side. I watched the business side of him respond to social problems in the community.

## How does the concept of “things fall apart” give you comfort?


Things *will* fall apart. All business-people do all day is solve problems. It’s important to remember this when we go into a situation where we don’t have maximum control. It’s part of

the nature of things. It’s a simple fact that you can’t control everything. I line up with Reformed theology—we are all depraved. The idea that things fall apart gives me breathing space and grace when I encounter fresh brokenness. But it’s also true that this is not the final word.

## We are called to be salt and light. How can “salt” be entrepreneurial?

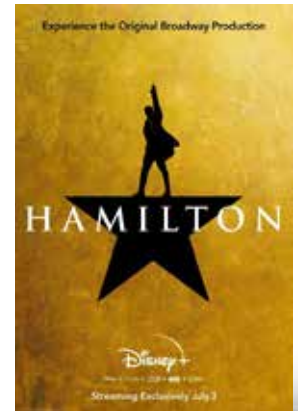
[Religion professor] Anthony Bradley says that salt was sometimes understood in the ancient world as a fertilizer, not just a preserver. Christians are called to go where nothing is growing and help bring new life and growth. We can go in with a sense of hope even if we feel hopeless. God has already set us up to be impactful. We can fertilize the world and bring life to places and situations that need it.

## We are facing challenging, divisive issues. How can we work together to be “faithfully present”?

Relating to people is hard and getting harder. Jesus told us it would be hard. The path forward will require more of us. It may be so difficult and painful. But Jesus modeled how to spiritually approach divisions. Now we are going to have to follow that. It’s about staying at the table even if we don’t agree. Christ-followers are called to that. It will take patience with people on journeys different from our own. But we can rest knowing God will make a way for us that brings life. 



Rudy Carrasco is a former member of Madison Square CRC. He lives in Vancouver, Wash., and now attends Village Church in Beaverton, Ore.



## Hamilton

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

Holding skepticism in one hand and eagerness in the other, I strapped in for 160 minutes of Lin-Manuel Miranda’s hip-hop musical about U.S. Founding Father Alexander Hamilton. Splicing two live Broadway performances from 2016, the film gives its audience a front-row seat and a bird’s-eye view that showcases the acting—one reason why it’s so revolutionary (that and the famously addictive score blending hip-hop, jazz, R&B, and show tunes). Miranda is excellent as the immigrant orphan from the Caribbean who became a Founding Father and the nation’s first treasury secretary. His passion, ambition, flaws, and gifts combine to make a spell-binding story. Longtime fans will find something new to admire, and newcomers will be enthralled. (Disney+)



## A Short Account of the History of Mathematics (Audiobook)

By W. Rouse Ball

Reviewed by Trevor Denning

Apparently Amazon thinks we all need to relax. To help with that, they have developed a series of Audible Originals designed to put us to sleep, including a history of mathematics narrated by Tony Shalhoub (Monk). While Shalhoub's voice is inarguably soothing, the subject is engaging enough to keep anyone awake through the half-hour runtime. Interestingly, much of what we know about mathematics comes from religious texts. The Egyptians, for example, were very particular about the placement of their temples. In a world that seems off-kilter, now more than ever there's something reassuring in remembering God knows the number of hairs on our heads and grains of sand by the sea. (Audible Original)

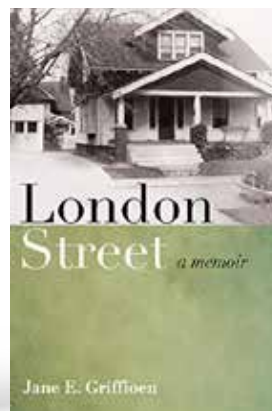


## Here for Jesus

By Nashville Life Music

Reviewed by Paul Delger

Reminiscent of Earth, Wind & Fire and other supergroups of the 1970s, CeCe Winans and artists from her Nashville church offer a boisterous album of urban worship music. Gospel icon Winans and her husband, Alvin Love, started New Life Church in 2012, and it has attracted a diverse range of talented music industry folk. Besides a '70s vibe, listeners will also hear modern hip-hop, gospel, and contemporary praise and worship. "More than Words" starts with a cheerleading chant and reflects on dedication to the Lord; "I've Got a Reason" boasts a vibrant gospel sound and says, "(God) woke me up this morning and gave me a testimony." This beautiful album is an energizing, life-giving testimony to God's universal church—diverse and harmonious. (Integrity Music)



## London Street: A Memoir

by Jane E. Griffioen

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

This engaging memoir of growing up in the 1950s and '60s in a Dutch American immigrant enclave in Grand Rapids, Mich., takes readers into the life of a family riddled with secrets that strangled the emotional and spiritual lives of its members. Jane's father constantly reminded his children of the dividing lines between Christians who were like them (Christian Reformed), the secular world, and other Christians who worshiped and lived differently than them. Still, Griffioen sensed God's grace in the church. *London Street* balances sharp criticism for grave injustices with grace, mercy, and refreshing compassion. Griffioen's detailed observations about immigrant life, her subtle humor about human foibles and inconsistencies, and her hard-earned wisdom make this memoir a worthwhile and meaningful read. (Resource Publications)

### The Lowdown

**A.D. 312:** Travel back to one of the most pivotal eras in history—a time when devotion to pagan gods was fading and the Roman Empire was being conquered by the sign of the cross—in *The Conqueror*, by Bryan Litfin. (Revell)

***Death on the Nile:*** Played by Kenneth Branagh, Agatha Christie's mustachioed detective Hercule Poirot is on holiday in Egypt and becomes involved in a love triangle gone murderously bad. (20th Century Studios)

**Who Is Your "Plus Two"?:** *Tell Me More* is an interview series hosted by Kelly Coorigan, *New York Times* bestselling author. It features conversations with influential leaders, such as *Just Mercy*'s Bryan Stevenson, and their "Plus Two" guests—two people they know, admire, and respect who have influenced their lives. (PBS)

**Jake Brigrance Is Back:** The hero of *A Time to Kill*, by John Grisham, one of the most popular novels of our time, returns in another courtroom drama, *A Time for Mercy*. (Doubleday)

# 4 Reasons We Can Trust the New Testament

There is much opposition to the possibility that the New Testament is trustworthy.



Alexandra Aodish is a non-denominational freelance Christian writer based in Sacramento, Calif. Check out her website at [alexandraaodish.com](http://alexandraaodish.com).

**IT'S A QUESTION** many scholars and laypeople have debated and discussed over the years: Can we trust the New Testament we possess today to be true to the original documents?

There is much opposition to the possibility that the New Testament is trustworthy. But after researching for myself, this is what I concluded: We can stand upon the New Testament's reliability with full confidence.

Apart from having faith that God will preserve his Word, there are four arguments that build a rock-solid case for why we can trust the New Testament.

First, the time gap between when the original Greek New Testament was estimated to have been written and our earliest surviving manuscript copies is very small—likely about 40-80 years! In contrast, Sophocles' plays have a time gap of 100-200 years, and Homer's *Iliad* and Livy's *History of Rome* have time gaps of 400 years.

Second, the number of manuscripts we possess in comparison to other ancient texts is significantly higher. The New Testament wins every time by a landslide. We have about 5,800 Greek manuscripts of various lengths cataloged. The New Testament also was translated into other languages early on. Sophocles' plays have roughly 190 manuscripts, Homer's *Iliad* has over 1,800 manuscripts, and Livy's *History of Rome* has about 150 manuscripts.

With many manuscripts we can compare them with each other and find our way back to the original.

Third, when comparing the Greek New Testament manuscripts, you'll find about 400,000 variants. Anyone would think this is an alarming number, but reliability is determined not by the number of variants, but their nature.

Most variants are misspellings or improper word order. In fact, 99% don't affect the texts' meaning. And if a variant has an effect on the text, there's no hiding it. As you read the New Testament, you'll find there are footnotes that indicate if a variant has any bearing in the text.

Fourth, outside sources, both Christian and non-Christian, affirm historical events in the New Testament. A couple of examples come from Cornelius Tacitus and Pliny the Younger.

In his *Annals*, Cornelius Tacitus, a non-Christian historian from A.D. 56-120, affirmed the existence of Jesus and the persecutions that early Christians endured (*Annals* 15:44).

Pliny the Younger was a Roman governor who wrote in a letter to Emperor Trajan what he learned from observing Christians. His excerpt affirms Christians met on a fixed day for worship, they believed Jesus to be God, and they held Jesus' teachings in high regard (Book Ten, Letter 96).

So then, can we trust the New Testament?

The answer is a resounding "Yes!"

The New Testament manuscript copies we have were written relatively close to their originals, and we possess more manuscript copies than any other document of antiquity. Fewer than 1% of its variants are meaningful, and it has Christian and non-Christian sources that affirm the events of the biblical account. If we are to question the reliability of the New Testament, then we should question every other historical work, too, because the New Testament surpasses in authenticity any other work of antiquity. **B**



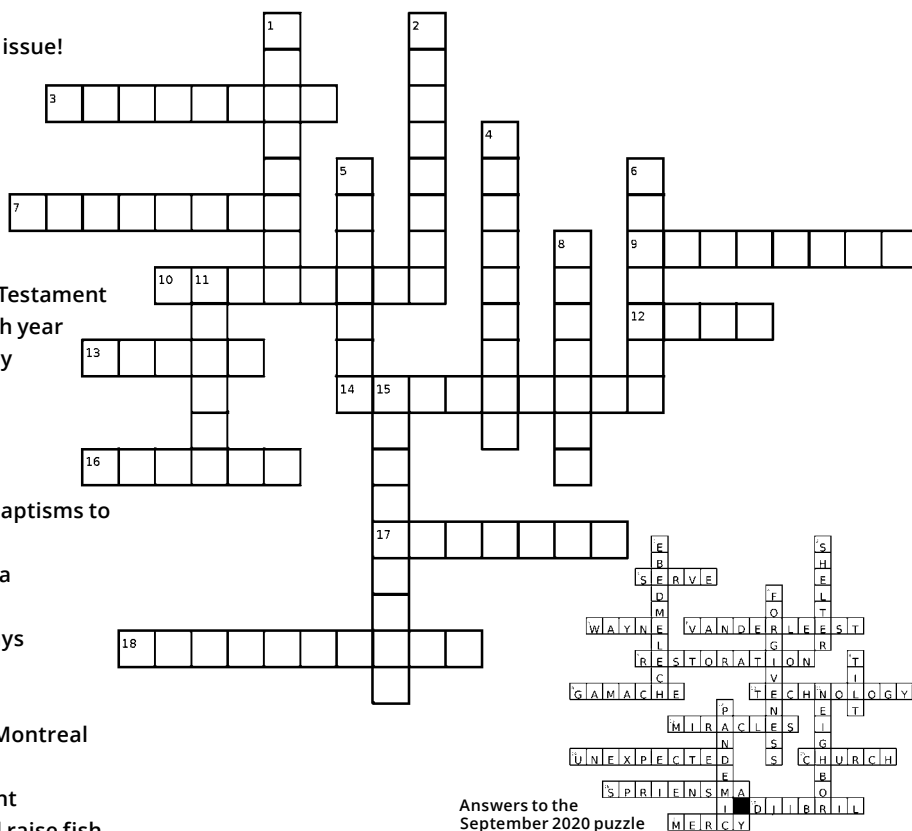
Find the answers to the crossword clues in this issue of *The Banner*. See the solution in the next issue!

**Down:**

1. Name of John Grisham's hero in *A Time to Kill*
2. Son of encouragement
4. \_\_\_\_\_ training begins at home
5. Phil's \_\_\_\_\_, a Christian nonprofit bringing hope to people living with cancer
6. Writer of *Annals*, which corroborates the New Testament
8. Vogel Center CRC thanks the Lord for this each year
11. Calvin Seminary joined with Calvin University to offer this type of course this summer
15. A word literally meaning off-center

**Across:**

3. What's altering everything from funerals to baptisms to literature distribution
7. Wildly popular musical by Lin-Manuel Miranda
9. Contributor to the book *Uncommon Ground*
10. Many people feel politically \_\_\_\_\_ these days
12. She found a safe place during WWII
13. This fruit has vitamin C
14. Ministry to \_\_\_\_\_, a mission in the Port of Montreal
16. Porch concert musician Ann \_\_\_\_\_
17. The only biblical book to reference retirement
18. A freshwater system to grow vegetables and raise fish



Answers to the September 2020 puzzle



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**Announcement of Candidacy**

We are pleased to announce that **DEREK ELLENS** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word. Colin P. Watson, Sr., Executive Director.

We are pleased to announce that **ERIC FREEMAN** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word. Colin P. Watson, Sr., Executive Director.

We are pleased to announce that **KENNEDY KAILITI** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word. Colin P. Watson, Sr., Executive Director.

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We are pleased to announce that **KELSI JONES** has now completed her academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word. Colin P. Watson, Sr., Executive Director.

**Available for Call**

The council of the Peace CRC of Menno, S. D. announces that **REV. STEVE MOERMAN** is eligible for call. He may be contacted at [pastor-moerman@yahoo.com](mailto:pastor-moerman@yahoo.com) or 605-759-0954.

**Church Positions Available**

**ASSOCIATE PASTOR** Sunnyside CRC in Sunnyside, WA is seeking an associate pastor to help us realize our vision of "connecting the valley to Christ." Job description is available at [sunrc.org](http://sunrc.org) If interested contact [pastor@sunrc.org](mailto:pastor@sunrc.org)

**LEAD PASTOR** - Aylmer CRC in Aylmer, Ontario is seeking a Lead Pastor gifted in the areas of shepherding and teaching. We are prayerfully searching for a self motivated and compassionate Pastor who is devoted to providing Reformed preaching, passionate about nurturing our spiritual growth and equipping us for community outreach. If this is a position you may feel God's calling to, we would love to speak with you. Please contact Lisa at 519-520-1220 or email [bruceandlisavk@hotmail.com](mailto:bruceandlisavk@hotmail.com). Job description and church profile are available on the Portal.

**Worship Services**

**WINTER WORSHIP IN BRADENTON FL.** Bradenton Chapel invites you to join us for Sunday Worship and Wed. Bible Study. Visit our website at [bradentonchapel.com](http://bradentonchapel.com)

**Birthday**

**BIRTHDAY 90 YEARS**

**BETTY OUDMAN** will celebrate her 90th birthday on October 28 in Taber, Alberta. Wife of the late Homer Oudman, she is mother of 10, (Hetty, Jack, Patrice, Andy, Wilbur, Greg, Janice, Rob, BJ and Marsha), grandmother of 17, and great-grandmother of 28. We are thankful for her long life of service and faithfulness.

**Anniversary**

**WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 70 YEARS**



**SPRONK,** Art & Mayme of 611 W Maple, Edgerton MN 56128 celebrated their 70th anniversary August 24. Their children Wanda &

Duane De Berg, Harlan & Diane, Cal & Mary Ann, Ivan & Lorilynn, and Wayne & Suzanne along with 17 grandchildren and 23 great grandchildren are grateful for God's goodness! "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken" Ecc 4:12b

**Obituaries**



**JONES,** Elizabeth (Bitsie), age 78, of Mexican Springs, New Mexico, passed away on August 6, 2020. Elizabeth was the daughter of Walter and Freda Bitsie, early translators for the missionaries to Tohatchi, NM. She was a lifetime

member of the First Navajo CRC, a pillar of the congregation, loved by many, a servant to all. Elizabeth was also a highly respected member of the Mexican Springs and Tohatchi communities. She drove a bus and served as a teacher's aide for 30 yrs for Tohatchi Schools. She was preceded in death by her husband of 60 years, William Jones Sr. and son, Maynard. She is survived by 10 of her children. Willamina (Truman) Badonie, William (Yolanda), Marvin (Janice), Kenneth (Lillian), Veronica, Donna, Kevin (Valerie), Walter (Genevieve), Felicia (Pete) Garcia, and Tanya. 19 grandchildren, and 16 great-grandchildren, who Elizabeth and family faithfully supported at Rehoboth Christian School music and athletics activities. Victory in Jesus!

**KNOPPERS-VER HOEF,** Rebecca, 58, of Alto, MI passed away on March 15, 2020. Preceded in death by her parents Jan and Ali Knoppers, she is survived by her husband of 32 years Jim, sons Kyle (Marissa), Christopher, Erik (Isabel), Luke, and granddaughter Cassandra, her sisters Jane (Brent) Cottingham, Maria Knoppers, and brother John (Sherry) Knoppers, her brother-in-law Dave (Terri) Ver Hoef, her sister-in-law Jan (Marc) Ver Hoef, and six nephews.

**MELS,** Ken, 85, of Orland Park, IL, went to be with his Lord on July 24, 2020. He is survived by his wife of 60 years, Marcia; children Scott (Deb), Sue (Rick) Van Dyken, Sharon (Marc) Zuiderveen and Sandy (Gordon) Geerdes; 16 grandchildren; 14 great-grandchildren.

**RITZEMA,** Patty, 99, of Fulton, IL, went home to her Lord on August 26, 2020. She was predeceased by her husband Bert, son Fred, and grandson Jamie Klaver. Survived by her children, Rosalie Ritzema, Dick (Lois) Ritzema, Trudy (Ken) Klaver, Jake (Priscilla) Ritzema, Bill (Anna) Ritzema, Ed (Diane) Ritzema, 20 grandchildren, and 46 great grandchildren. We dearly miss our loving, hugging prayer warrior!



**SCHREIBER, Derek Brian**, age 54, passed away peacefully on August 26, 2020. He is survived by Jane, his loving wife of over 30 years, his children Katherine (Adam) Zacharuk & Benjamin; his parents Bertus & Alice Schreiber, his siblings: Sylvia (Tymen) Van Stryland, Martha Schreiber (Shiao Chong), & John Schreiber; brother-in-law Albert den Otter (Krista), sister-in-law Alice den Otter (Steve); 3 nephews, 5 nieces, 2 great-nephews & 1 great-niece. Predeceased by his parents-in-law, Jacob & Tieny den Otter, & his brother-in-law, James den Otter. Derek worked 29 years for the Christian Labour Association of Canada as a Provincial Representative. He generously shared his musical talents & technical abilities, especially in church. A passionate man of God, with a big personality & an even larger heart, he was widely loved by those who knew him. Contact: Jane Schreiber, 18931 97th Ave. Edmonton, AB T5T 5P5. [janeschreiber@shaw.ca](mailto:janeschreiber@shaw.ca)



**TAZELAAR, Gertrude "Gert"** Kooima, 93 of Lombard went home to be with our LORD on August 11, 2020. Beloved wife of the late Raymond Tazelaar and the late Robert Kooima; loving mother of Robert (Patricia) Kooima, Barbara (David) Vander Meulen, Arlene (Martin) Wezeman, George (Deanne) Kooima, James (Laura) Kooima, and Carol Verlare; stepmother of the late Pete (the late Grace) Tazelaar, Jan (Joe) Commanda, Beth (Larry) Cunningham, the late Tom (Ruth) Tazelaar, Karen (George) Folkerts, Jim (Jo) Tazelaar, John (Cindy) Tazelaar, and Rob (Laura) Tazelaar; grandmother of 44, great-grandmother of 105; fond sister of Florence "Duck" (the late John) Davids, the late Simon Boeringa, the late Jennie (Peter) Rocco, and the late John (Bernice and the late Karen) Boeringa, Jr.; aunt of many nieces and nephews. Memorials to Providence Life Services are appreciated.

**VAN STEDUM LANENGA, Grace**, nee Wiers age 97, went to be with her LORD on August 21, 2020. Beloved wife of the late Richard Van Stedum and late Richard Lanenga; loving mother of Warren (Sheryl) Van Stedum, Lois (Dan) Reagan, Rick Van Stedum; stepmother of Rich (Charlene) Lanenga, Elyn (Robert) Nicodem, Greg (Linda) Lanenga and Russ (Mary) Lanenga; devoted grandmother of 16, and step-grandmother of 12; great-grandmother of 16, step-great grandmother of 13, and great-great Grandmother of 2; fond sister of the late Ann (the late Lambert) Bos, and brother of the late William (the late Ann) Wiers; fond aunt of many nieces and nephews. Grace was a faithful woman. She showed love her whole life in the way she treated people and loved the Lord. She was loved by many and she will truly be missed. Memorials to Providence Life Services, and Life on Wheels are appreciated. For info: [www.knollcrest.net](http://www.knollcrest.net) or 630-932-1500.

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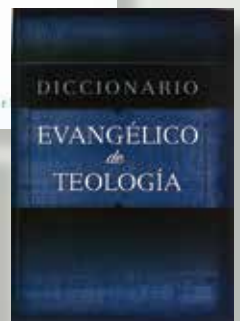
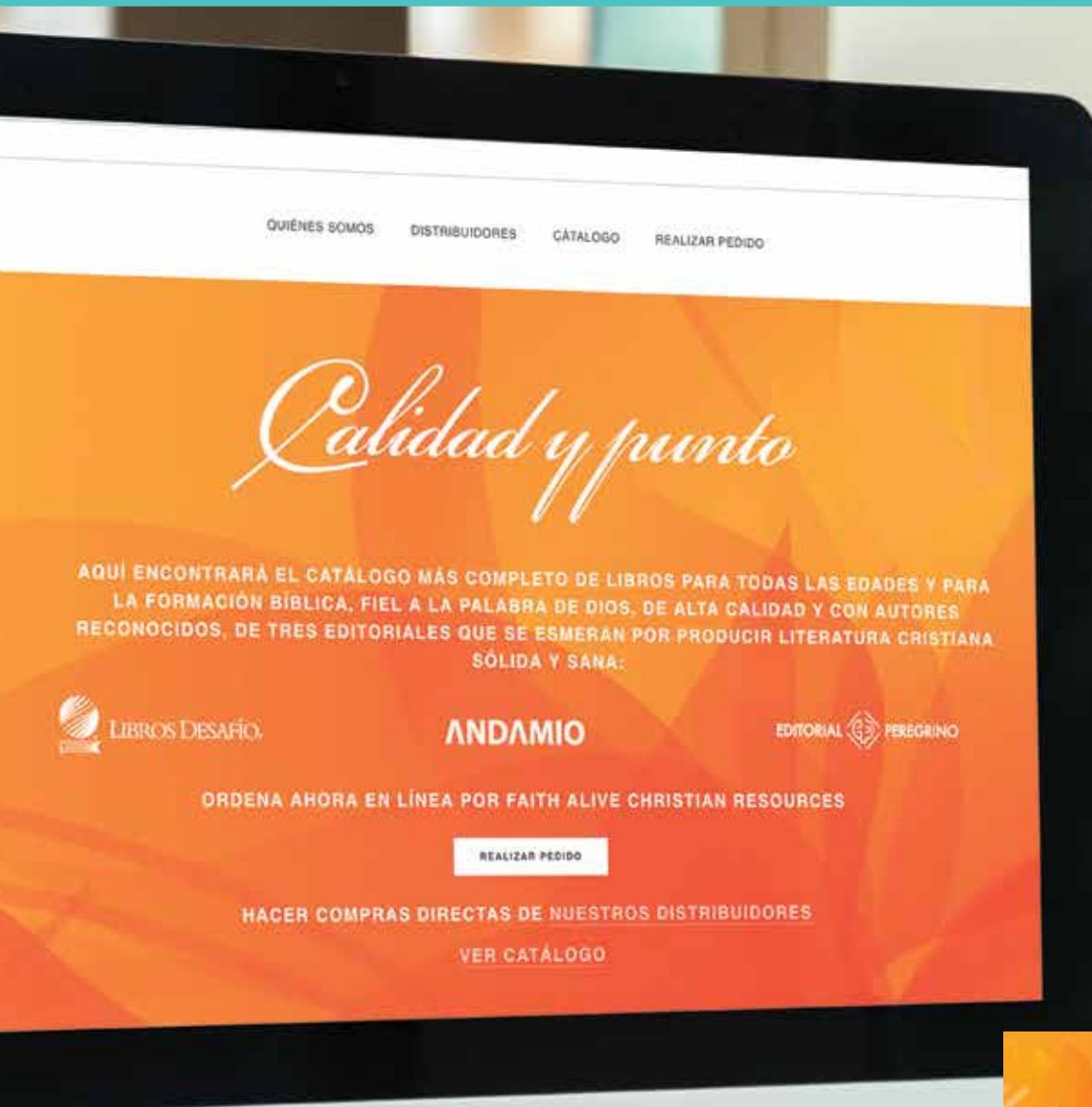
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# The Stoning

It was the stoning,  
an excruciatingly  
painful and  
prolonged  
execution, that  
shook me up.



Charlotte F. Otten is a retired professor of English at Calvin University. She attends Calvin Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

**A STONE STRUCK PAUL** so hard on the head that he was knocked unconscious. The fall jarred open a memory of another stoning—one in which he had participated. Paul saw the man named Stephen being stoned for claiming that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, the risen Lord. Stephen's face radiated light as he prayed for God to forgive his stoners. Paul drifted into darkness.

"He's dead," the stone-thrower said, dropping a rock from his hand.

"Now we'll see who's going to rise from the dead," another said.

The men were sweating, but they had to get rid of the body before nightfall. They staggered as they dragged it like trash outside the gates of the city.

As soon as the stone-throwers were out of sight, Paul's friends surrounded him. "Paul! Paul!" they called again and again to his limp body.

"Yes, Lord," dribbled from his mouth.

"He's alive! He thinks Jesus is calling him."

Very gently they helped him sit up. When he recognized them, he said, "I thought I was dead, but Jesus came to my rescue."

Still a little dazed, Paul's thoughts wandered into recurring questions of identity: Who am I? Why was I tracked down and stoned?

The next morning, feeling the painful bruises from the stoning, his tongue discovering some loose teeth, he and Barnabas left Lystra for Derbe.

It was the stoning, an excruciatingly painful and prolonged execution, that shook me up. Over the years I had assigned Paul a number of roles: He

was a successful planter of churches, a brilliant writer, litigator, theologian, philosopher, and judge. His voice was the call of the Reformation. But for me, he had lost his human features.

After seeing his human face in the stoning, I met Paul again in his daring claim to the Galatians that he had suffered Christ's wounds: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). This was Paul, the human being who had discovered that fleshly wounds were at the heart of his identity with Christ. He bore on his body "the marks of Jesus" (Gal. 6:17).

Paul clung to the broken body and the shed blood of Jesus Christ when he wrote the holy communion liturgy: "This is my body, which is for you. ... This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (1 Cor. 11:24-25). B



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